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Science Fiction & Fantasy STORIES

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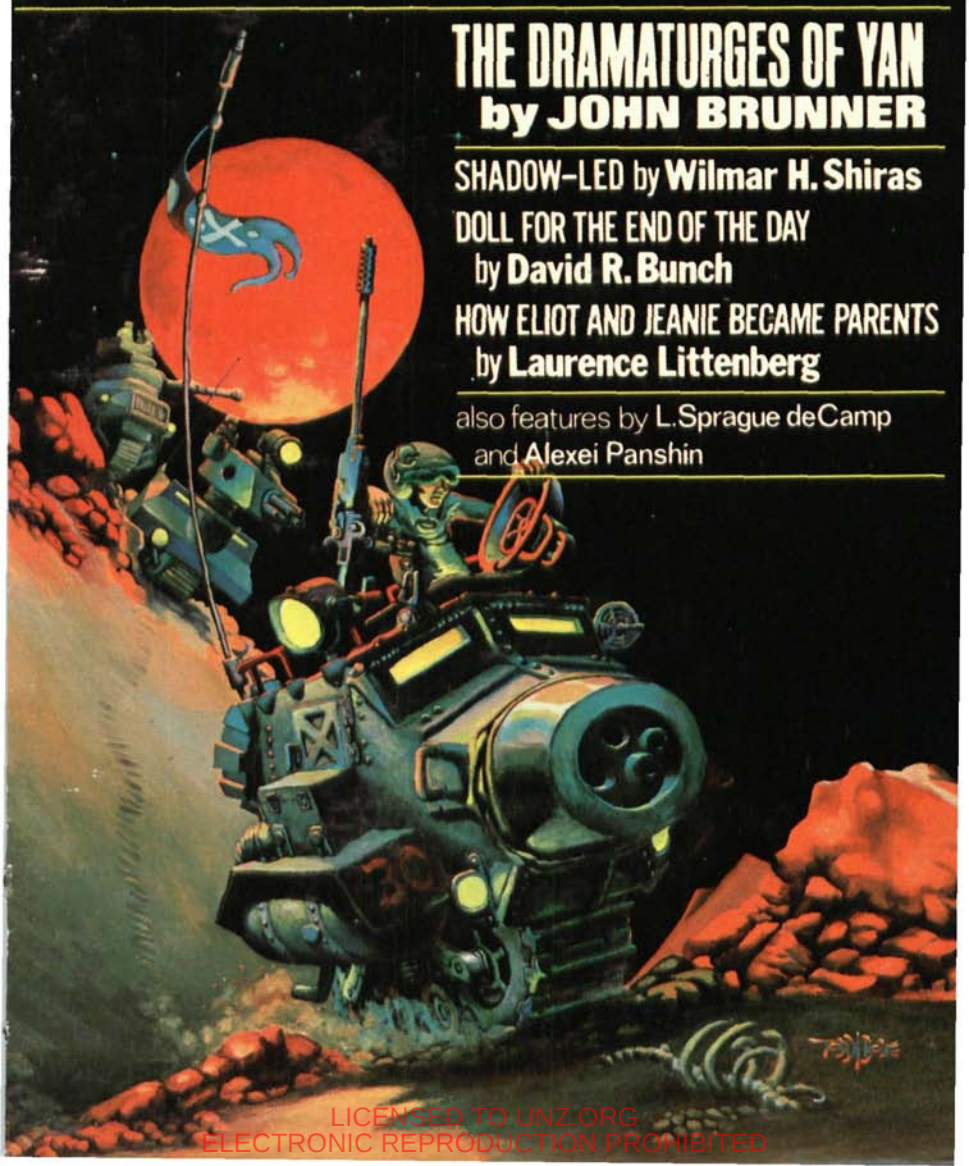

THE DRAMATURGES OF YAN
by JOHN BRUNNER

SHADOW-LED by Wilmar H. Shiras

DOLL FOR THE END OF THE DAY
by David R. Bunch

HOW ELIOT AND JEANIE BECAME PARENTS
by Laurence Littenberg

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)CTOBER, 1971 VOL. 21. No. 1

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ANTASTIC, Vol. 21, No. 1, October 1971, *is published bi-monthly by* **ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO., INC. 69-62 230 Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364.** Editorial office: Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Business office: Purchase, N.Y. Box 175, Portchester, N.Y. at 60¢ *a copy. Subscription rates: One year (6 issues). United States and* possessions: $3.00; Canada and Pan American Union countries: $3.50; all other countries $4.00. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. *Second Class Postage paid* at Flushing, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. Copyright 1971 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with *reasonable care; however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety* of art work, photographs or manuscripts.

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TED WHITE: EDITORIAL

Periodically, someone challenges me about my gloomy prediction that civilization ("as we know it—or, indeed, as *anyone* knows it") will fall in the near future. I have variously (depending upon the mood of the nation, the temperature-humidity index of the day, or another orgy of reading scientific projections of present-day trends) predicted the end of civilization (or, "chaos") to arrive from five years to twenty-five years from now.

I'm never entirely sure how serious I am when I make this prediction, and it remains my one ray of irrational hope that if we can make it into the next century safely, the worst might be over. But the more one informs himself about the many potentials for disaster now with us, the harder it becomes to nourish even that slight wisp of hope. Things, friends, do look gloomy.

But as I say, every so often I'm challenged. "If you really believe that," goes the challenge, "what are you doing about it?"

This question breaks down into two areas: the political and the personal, and my answer is usually predicated on the bias of my challenger.

If by "what are you doing about it you mean *What am I doing to prevei it?* the answer is, not much. The variou potentials for disaster seem to me to b of collossal jugernaut proportions: famin for instance. Isaac Asimov has sever times on tv predicted world-wide famin within the next ten years. He doesn't soun at all happy about it, nor has he muc of a solution to offer, and if I were to gues I'd guess he's scared. It's the only intell gent position one can take. Political ac tion has always struck me as more myt than reality. This may be my own cynica bias (see my editorial in the Februar issue), but certainly as pertains to the stat of Asia I think I may reasonably say have almost no political reality—my influ ence as a human being is almost nil. An famine certainly looks like a certainty fo large parts of Asia. Technology, new agri cultural developments in super-plants- these are minor symptomatic treatments The problem is too many people. And th numbers of people continue to grow, ex ponentially. Out of a famine-squeeze continent, I think we can expect greate irrationality in national activities, an most likely greater recklessness—very pos

(Continued on page 115

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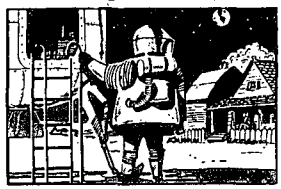

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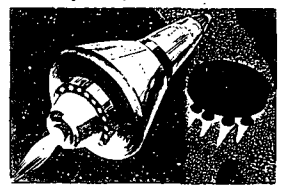

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THE DRAMATURGES OF YAN

JOHN BRUNNER

Illustrated by MICHAEL WM. KALUTA

Millennia earlier, the Dramaturges of Yan had created the lasting artifacts of the Mutine Age—vast constructs which lay across the landscape of the planet in enigmatic witness to the greatness that was once Yan. Now came a new Dramaturge, and the possibility of a second Mutine Age. But this Dramaturge was a Human . . .

(First of Two Parts)

ACROSS THE NIGHT the Ring of Yan arched like a silver bow, shedding the small bright fire-arrows of meteors into the upper air. Tired, but with so much tension in his brain he knew he would not yet be able to sleep—and unwilling, unless he was driven to it, to resort to his repose-inducer—Dr Yigael Lem discarded his formal Earthsider clothes in favour of a Yannish webweave gown and reed sandals, and walked out on his verandah to contemplate the sight he customarily relied on to pacify his thoughts. Madame de Pompadour, the pet chubble who had accompanied him to seven systems, had expected him to retire and accordingly had settled down in the dormicle to await his arrival. On realising he had gone elsewhere she gave a brief squawk of complaint, but ultimately gathered the energy to come and join him. She moved stiffly. She, like her owner, was getting old.

The air was mild with the promise of spring, and the earliest of his famous i blossoms were starting to show. A few years ago he had decided to tinker with the faulty gene in the original species which sometimes caused it to revert to the wild state, its flowers mere balls of characterless green fluff, and achieved spectacular success—more by luck than skill, he always insisted when someone tried to compliment him on what he'd done, because although he had had to study physical medicine as a young man and graduated with distinction in gene-repair, he had not practised the technique for decades.

Now his garden was bordered by a hedge of unparalleled magnificence, from which even Speaker Kaydad had condescended to accept a cutting. Under the pale radiance of the Ring the buds on their tall segmented stalks looked like polished skulls, ready to open their jaws and utter indescribable statements of fragrance.

Convinced he wasn't going anywhere else for the moment, Pompy lay down and began to croon contentedly to herself, a curling question-mark of fur on the smooth tiles of the verandah. Occasional sounds drifted from nearby houses: a child's half-hearted cry for

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attention, laughter, the plaintive whistle of someone experimenting with a Yannish flute. But it was late now, and under these few surviving indices of wakefulness he could hear, quite plainly, the rushing of the great river Smor.

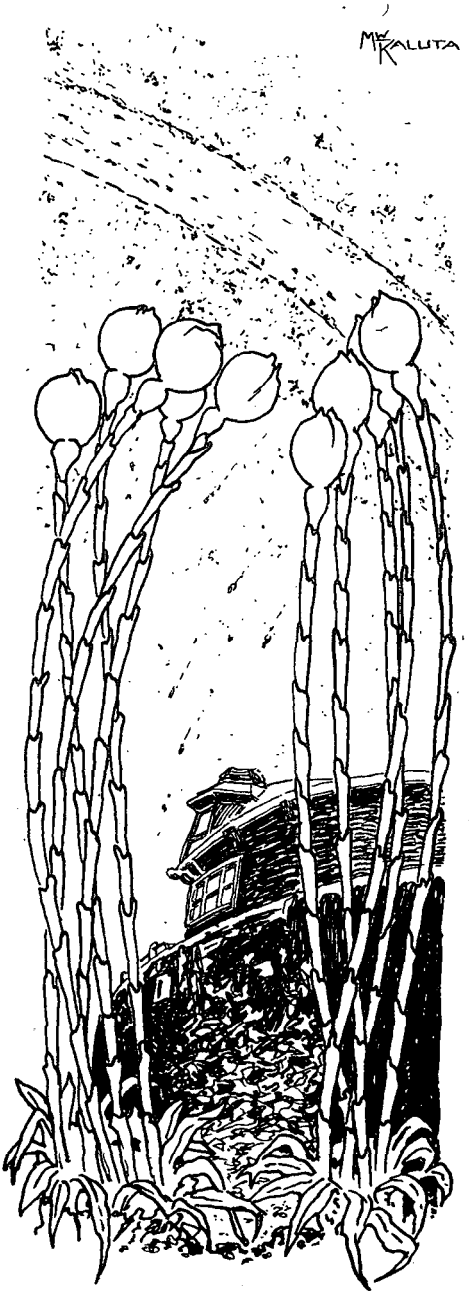
His home was on the crest of the highest rise in the neighbourhood. From opposite ends of this curved verandah he could look out over both the enclave of the Earthsiders—dominated by the go-board and by the dome of the informat—and also the native city Prell, spined by the black river running between the stone-paved ribs of its streets. Gloglobes bobbed on the bows of barges moored at the Isum Quay, like luminous fruit on branches stirred by the wind. One revealed to him the unmistakable outline of a *kortch*, the coffin-like case in which a Yannish baby born today or yesterday was to be transported away from its mother: upstream to Liganig, or along the coast to Frinth. There were good reasons why the Yanfolk were not deep-water sailors. . . or at least not nowadays. But they relied a great deal on river and coastal trade.

I ought to know whose child that is. A birth is an event among the Yanfolk.

But even as the words formed inside his head, they were driven aside by others, peculiarly sinister.

I wonder whose place it's due to take.

Instantly he was angry with himself. That wasn't a fair way to think of *shrimashey*. Surely he, as a psychologist, should be detached, should refrain from making human value-judgments about alien customs. In any case, it wouldn't be anybody he knew whose place was taken; the equation would be balanced elsewhere, at Liganig or Frinth or still further distant from Prell.



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When they celebrate a birth, though, it's so ironical to realise they're also holding a wake, displaced in time—a wake for someone not yet dead, whom they haven't met!

Determinedly, he sought to thrust notions of that sort to the back of his mind. It was in vain. They kept recurring, like a shadow cast over his thoughts. Indeed the impression of being overshadowed was so strong, he jerked around without intending to, as though there might actually be a silent menace trying to catch him unawares from behind, and his eyes were seized and held by the tall crystal pillars silhouetted against the lowest level of the Ring: the shafts of the Mutine Mandala.

The Yanfolk prefer to keep a hill or two between themselves and such enigmas; therefore they gladly gave us this stretch of ground to site our homes, from the crest of my rise to the far side of the valley. Once I thought: how wonderful to see that splendid monument to vanished greatness every morning with the new light striking it, fired every noontide by the famous Flash! Now, though. . .

"Pompy!" he said, irritated. The chubble, half asleep, had rolled over and licked his bare toes with her long bluish tongue. But he was, in fact, relieved that he had been distracted from staring at the Mandala, the nearest and probably the most impressive of the incredible relics scattered as randomly as confetti over the face of Yan—randomly by the principles of mankind, at any rate, though perhaps not in the opinion of their builders.

He dropped into a chair which faced neither the river and the city nor the coloured translucent roofs of the Earthsiders' homes, darkening one by one in an irregular pattern as the occupant decided it was bedtime, but square towards the Northern Range. There the luminance of the Ring was caught by a patch of ice on the flank of Mount Fley, like a white jewel among the piled black hair of a queen. That was where among eternal snows, the River Smoi took its rise, the weeping of a glacier as the Yanfolk said.

They did weep. And that was not the most extraordinary of their resemblances to mankind.

To his left and right lay the habitable lands: the fertile plains of Rhee cross-hatched with fields and orchards whose pattern had not altered in millennia, the pleasant rolling downlands of Hom dotted with thickets of nut-trees and traversed by herds of shy creatures like deer with long thick silver-grey tails, and the sloping plateau of Blaw where plants corresponding to fungi grew in fat succulent slabs from time-cracked rocks. The Yanfolk collected and dried their spores to make a coffee-like drink named morningbrew.

At his back, and to the south, was Kralgak, or as one might say "Dangerland"—that zone marked at night by stabbing white lances, on which the Ring continually hurled portions of its substance deflected from orbit by the never-ceasing clashes between its particles. That was a fearful region, pocked like the skin of a loathsomely diseased face, into which neither humans nor Yanfolk dared venture for fear of being smashed by heavenly hammers. Southward again, in the corresponding subtropical zone, were the lands of the wilders, cousins of the northern Yanfolk but degenerate; their language had pared down to a few crude syllables and

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heir only tools were sticks to grub for oots.

And beneath his feet, at the antipodes of Prell, was the water-hemisphere: the Ocean of Scand. There too, under the equatorial girdle of the Ring, the debris of the skies came slamming down and made the waves boil.

It was best not to think of Kralgak or the wilders at night, which was why all the houses of the Earthsiders' enclave standing high enough on the hillside to afford a view in that direction were arranged like Dr Lem's—with their main outlook to the north. Trying not to remember what it had cost this planet to enjoy the lovely shining arch spanning its sky, he gazed up towards the few stars which shimmered through the blurring dust of the stratosphere, like single raindrops caught on fur. Each was surrounded by a tiny rainbow halo, miniatures of the one which framed the sun by day in a polychrome haze less predictable than a kaleidoscope.

Why did I decide to come here?

The question sprang from his subconscious and took him by surprise. He had been asked it, often and often, because almost every year strangers—typically very young—wandered across the go-board to Yan looking for goodness knew what . . . and, with increasing frequency, it was Dr Lem among all the long-term residents that these birds of passage wanted to talk to. It was a curious sensation to be—well-known? Not exactly. Notorious? That wasn't the word, either. But, anyhow: to have been heard of, elsewhere in the galaxy.

The visitors always took to Pompy, and overfed her disgracefully.

Hmm! Where was I? Oh, yes.

There were convincing superficial reasons for his decision to settle on Yan. He could say, honestly enough, that he had almost reached the limit of his opportunities to travel; it was a strain on both body and mind to use the go-board, and he had begun his voyaging too late to acquire the adaptive flexibility some people rejoiced in. He had already been middle-aged. Moreover he was no longer so mentally resilient that he enjoyed coping with the crazy-seeming shifts of life-style found on planets wholly dominated by humans, which could oblige the population to change centuries overnight . . . so to speak.

He had therefore been looking for something stable—something, however, which would offer more than simply a chance to reflect and vegetate. The placid, quasi-pastoral existence of Yan would have appealed to him anyhow, he admitted. As a sort of bonus, though, it was shot through and through with enigmas which better minds than his had chip-chip-chipped at for almost a century. One could at least hope, he had said in a self-deprecating tone to so many of those youthful visitors, that constant exposure to them might help towards an eventual solution. And they would nod, distantly aware of the mystery of the wats and mandalas and menhirs dotted around the planet, all far beyond the capacities of modern Yanfolk and some—like the Mullom Wat—even exceeding the abilities of mankind.

So here he had been for thirty-odd years, wrestling with the riddle of *shrimashey* . . . and hunting desperately for meaningful equivalents to those Yannish concepts which performed the

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same function in linguistic terms as "science," "technology," "natural law," but which absolutely and incontestably could *not* be translated by those words . . . and, of course, butting his head against that conundrum above all which the Yanfolk posed: the question of how a species so astonishingly like mankind, equally intelligent, equally varied as regards temperament, could have done what they seemed to have managed millennia ago—decided that there was a *proper* way to live, and adhered to it for thousands of years with no discernible alterations.

Now and then he had fancied himself within grasping distance of a key to all these problems together, as though he had been rattling the pieces of a jigsaw-puzzle back and forth in a box for years on end, and suddenly glanced down to see. . . Well, not the complete pattern, but enough to indicate how the remaining pieces should be added.

And somehow, every time, he had found he was wrong.

Yet he had never really hoped that that achievement would crown the time he had spent on Yan. He knew that.

No, in the last analysis I came here because . . .

Because Yan was at once a beautiful and a terrible world, everything about it seeming fined down to the barest essentials. Its range of contrasts, from the horrors of Kralgak to the idyllic paradise of Hom, was as great as might be found on any habitable planet; yet there was a grand simplicity about it. Each element composing the overall variety was unique: there was *one* great ocean, *one* harsh desert, *one* delightful garden-like prairie. . .

I felt—drawn.

The other meaning of that term provoked him to raise his fingertips and pass them across his face, knowing what a mirror would have shown him. Beneath his shock of grizzled hair his forehead was furrowed, while his cheeks were shrunken and his neck-tendons stood out like stretched cords. Under his gown the mildness of the spring night turned to the stone chill of approaching age.

I've grown old, Dr Lem admitted to himself. *I ought to start thinking about where I want to die. Here? But it's one thing to pick a planet to live on; to die on it is something else.*

When his thoughts took this morbid a turn, he realised, it was high time to put himself to sleep. He half-turned in his chair, stretching out a hand to prod Pompy, and froze in mid-motion. Over the distant silhouette of the Mutine Mandala the white disc of the moon was rising.

But there was no moon on Yan, and had not been for nearly ten thousand years.

II

WHEN THE IMPOSSIBLE moon rose, Marc Simon was trudging gloomily homeward from what should have been a soirée at Goydel's house, a few paces behind his Yannish mistress Shyalee who was completely out of patience with him.

Tonight he had wound himself up to a climactic step, the most important since his decision four years ago to quit the Earthside enclave and settle in the upstream quarter of Prell among the artists, minstrels and fine artificers. Ac-

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quiring Shyalee had been as nothing compared to the simple act of moving to a small house with three rooms and a pool full of nenuphars; it had seemed like the natural extension of a single process.

Continued too long? After all, among the Yanfolk a woman never lived with a man for more than a year at a time.

He was tempted for an instant to think that a change might cure his trouble. Then, catching sight of Shyalee ahead of him on the slanting street as she passed in and out of the gleam of a gloglobe over a house-door—boy-slim, heart-stoppingly beautiful—he knew it was only his current mood of frustration that had made him consider dismissing her. There would be plenty of others willing to take her place. But the likelihood of finding somebody pleasanter to live with would be nil.

Although . . .

Briefly, he found himself wondering what it would be like to make love again with a girl having breasts and a skin all of one colour, who needed sometimes to break off from a kiss because she had to breathe in through her mouth. But that had nothing to do with his problem. Nothing at all. It was irrelevant.

Moreover he'd had the chance, now and then, and ignored it.

No, what I'm concerned about is—

Well, if only Shyalee had been able to understand what it had cost him to decide that tonight, at Goydel's soirée, he would move on from the translations in which he had so long specialised, and whose raw material he knew to be good because it was borrowed from talents greater than his own, to the presentation of an original composition in Yannish.

And then to find *shrimashey* in progress, the whole company lost in that mindless weaving pseudo-dance, forcibly regressed who could tell how many steps down the evolutionary ladder. . . . !

Perhaps it had saved him from hideous embarrassment. Perhaps what he had proposed to offer his friends was no more than crude doggerel. Most likely he would have had no way of telling. The Yanfolk were always polite, and they were particularly polite to poets. When it came to an Earthsider poet, the politeness was redoubled; while the older Yanfolk did not share the unquestioning adulation which had turned so many of their young people into what the Earthsiders insultingly called "apes"—imitating Earthside clothing, manners and habits, salting their speech with human words—Earth and all things Earthly enjoyed indescribable cachet everywhere on this planet. So even the lousiest rubbish would have been assured of a warm reception.

And it would have been useless asking Shyalee's opinion in advance. She was fantastically beautiful, having delicate bones, huge dark eyes, slender limbs like wands, and of course that organ, the *caverna veneris*, which made its counterpart in a human girl seem like a spur-of-the-moment mechanical imitation. He had sometimes thought of it as being independently alive, and that was almost true, for it was controlled from that specialised ganglion near the base of the spine.

But he had had to argue and argue with her, before they left for Goydel's, to make her put on his favourite among her costumes, a webweave cloak of misty blue, finer than gossamer. She

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herself had wanted to wear Earthside dress—adapted by being slit under the arms, naturally, so that there was a free flow of air to her spiracles. She would never have become his mistress had she not practically worshipped Earth and Earthmen. Deaf to the grandeur of the Mutine Epics, scorning their subject as stale and of interest only to reactionary oldsters, she had long ago resigned herself to putting up with Marc's interest in Yannish poetry as one of the penalties she had to pay for being envied by her own generation of Yanfolk.

Paradox, Marc thought. *I could never have enjoyed Shyalee without that fault in her which I most detest!*

He had been so furious—so grief-stricken—when he found *shrimashey* at Goydel's, he had caught up one of the bowls of the *sheyashrim* drug and fully intended to gulp it down . . . even though he knew it didn't have the same effect on humans as on Yanfolk, didn't turn over the control of the body to the lower ganglion, but merely wiped out the cortex for a while, making the limbs twitch randomly and releasing the sphincters. It would have been a symbolic act. Only she had knocked the bowl out of his hand and told him, in detail, what a fool he was.

Right. I could have been staggering shamefacedly back this way, reeking of the content of my bowels.

Only . . .

Here was a question which Marc ordinarily avoided, but tonight could not. Had she saved him from his own stupidity for his personal sake, or merely because he was that walking wonder of the world, an Earthman?

He pictured himself as though he had been able to float out of his body and roost on the eaves of the house he was passing, to watch go by this lean, almost gaunt young man, his black hair and swarthy skin testifying to the intrusion of North Africans among the French who had bequeathed him both his name and his taste for patterns of words so strained and disciplined that one could hear them cry out under the concentrated load of meaning focused into every syllable. He could have been wearing Earth-style shirt and breechlets, but was not; having chosen to make his home among the Yanfolk, he had adopted their garb, the toga-like *heyk* and *welwa* cape.

Externals, to his lasting regret, marked the limit of his assimilation. He had to go back to the enclave now and then, though he kept his visits to a minimum. He could breathe Yannish air, drink Yannish water, take a Yannish mistress whose loveliness gripped his throat every time he looked at her—but this was not an Earthsider's world, made over to fit his race, and he sometimes had to step out of it, to buy essential foods or medicines, and endure the cold-shouldering, the scornful stares, the whispering behind his back. . . .

It wasn't only his living with Shyalee which so angered the inhabitants of the enclave, he was sure of that. They treated Alice Ming civilly enough, and her situation was like his, although the sexes were reversed. She, however, was always among the first to dial the library when a new batch of Earthside tapes was delivered, and collected groups of apes to watch them with her lover. His name was Rayvor, but he preferred to be known as Harry.

Demonstrating the proper status of her species, Marc summarised sourly.

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Whereas I've "Gone native." I'm a traitor.

What, though, was the point of being on a planet with intelligent aliens, unless one got to close quarters and tried one's hardest to understand? And that meant more than just a tumble with a native bed-mate now and then . . . an experiment he was sure almost every adult in the enclave must have tried by now, with the possible exception of old Dr Lem. Even that arrogant slob Warden Chevsky! And he actually boasted of not speaking a word of Yannish!

Doesn't it matter to them that the Mutine Mandala was standing tall and fine before the crudities of Stonehenge or the Pyramids were cobbled together by barbarians?

Presumably, not. Yet this above all was what fascinated him about his adopted home: the sense that something wonderful had been accomplished, with a kind of finality about it, leaving behind the indelible impression that the Yanfolk were—were fulfilled. He had struggled often and often to convey to Shyalee and her friends his view of the relative merits of what Earthsiders and Yanfolk had done, trying to make them see why the blind random hunting which had carried humanity out among the stars was *not* automatically superior, because it could never lead to a satisfying conclusion. How could anyone foresee an end to the wanderings of mankind? Like the purposeless sprawl of a climbing plant humans had crept out from sun to sun, with no promise of an ultimate achievement to crown the scheme, such as he was sure he sensed on Yan. He believed beyond the possibility of contradiction that here some colossal task—logically the one described in the eleven books of the Mutine Epics—had been conceived, and undertaken, and concluded. Now, their struggles behind them, the Yanfolk were at peace.

Shyalee would not even listen to that kind of talk any longer. Nor would her friends. One could hardly say they had rebelled, because no members of the older generation had ever put more substantial obstacles in their path than an occasional caustic comment, but they had turned their backs on their own way of life. They thought everything Earthly was marvelous, preferring syntholon to webweave, alien tapes to their own infinitely subtle traditional culture-forms. Instead of accompanying him to Goydel's soirées, which he regarded as a tremendous honour because notoriously Goydel was the current arbiter of taste in Prell, he knew she would far rather have gone to Alice Ming's, sipped distasteful Earthside liquors with feigned enjoyment, gabbled the evening away in small-talk, as much in the foreign tongue as in her own.

Yes. She puts up with me. That's all our relationship amounts to.

Despair darkened his mind for a moment. Then, suddenly, he realised that—as though repenting of her short-tempered behaviour when they left Goydel's—Shyalee had stopped by the door of their home and was waiting for him. He hurried the last few yards and caught her hand, forcing a smile as he opened the door for her. It was not locked. Theft and burglary were contrary to Yannish custom, which meant they were literally unthinkable.

Together they stepped over the threshold into the atrium, where at the far end of an oval pool a fountain

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pumped ceaselessly among nenuphar-leaves. There was something a little Roman and something a little Japanese about this commonplace Yannish house where he had settled; instead of interior walls it had screens which could be moved aside in warm weather so that the paved centre court became an extension of the three small plain rooms with their sparse furniture and perfectly proportioned ornaments. The fountain had been an idea of his own, which had been copied widely by Shyalee's friends. As he had realised later, it was too vigorous to accord with authentic Yannish attitudes, because it repeated over and over the same unaltering pattern, wasting effort to an utterly predictable end. But before he recognised how out of keeping it was Shyalee had become too attached to it for him to have it removed.

"Do you want," Shyalee said, beginning in her own tongue and ending in his, "a nightcap?"

Rage gripped him for an instant: *how often must I tell you that I hate this ape's habit of mixing Yannish and human words?* But he restrained himself, and managed to nod, even though speech was for the moment beyond him. She vanished into the house, and he continued to his favourite stone seat overlooking the pond. As he went, he tugged from his baldric-slung pouch his copy of Book Nine of the Mutine Epics; currently he was revising his translation of it, and had taken it to Goydel's tonight just in case his original . . .

No, what's the use of fooling myself? Not "in case my original poem was so well received they asked for more." In case my courage failed me at the last moment . . .

Staring at the nenuphars, noting how the spring warmth had brought the buds forward, he murmured under his breath a snatch of the passage he was having most trouble with.

"By water standing fast, forging decision,
Mastering fluid-flow, murky creation
Carving a softness—"

He broke off. It wouldn't do. It simply would not *do*. It was lame, like a spavined horse driven under too heavy a load. The notion of "carving softness" lacked the paradoxical quality of the original, because carving suggested knives or chisels, hard sharp edges, whereas the root associations of the Yannish words implied that the tool was softer than the material being worked—like water eroding a rock. Yet "eroding" had overtones of long patient geological processes, while the Yannish verse made it clear that what happened took place instantly!

"Oh, hell," he said aloud. Was there any point in going on? Was there any point in trying to sort out the hard core of historicity in these baffling Epics? It went without saying that behind these actual solid mementoes, the menhirs, the mandalas, the wats, behind these fanciful descriptions of sunken continents and shattered moons, there must lie objective truth. But how far towards which end of the scale?

The orthodox view was the rational one; about ten thousand years ago, it declared, there had been a catastrophe—perhaps Yan's moon had been dragged from orbit by the intrusion into this system of another body of comparable size, or possibly there had been a collision. The moon had been barely outside the local Roche's Limit. The event had either smashed

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it into fragments, or else tugged it close enough to the planet for it to pull itself apart. Either way, it had thereupon become the Ring.

This fantastic calamity, according to the rational explanation, had shattered not only the moon but the confidence of the Yanfolk. From a vaulting, ambitious people with considerable scientific knowledge, they had declined into a beaten one, half of whose world was inaccessible to them thanks to the rain of meteorites from the Ring, and most of whose technical achievements had been left to go to ruin while they contented themselves with staying alive.

To console themselves for their retreat to a semi-primitive existence, to excuse their decadence, they invented a myth about a vanished Golden Age which it was futile to try and imitate because the greatest and most powerful individuals of the species, the geniuses—half poets, half scientists—whom humans referred to as "dramaturges," had been destroyed.

But according to that myth the dramaturges themselves had caused the breakup of the moon. In some sense, possibly this might be true. Some dangerous experiment—unlikely to have been the release of fusion-energy because Yannish "science" had taken a different route, but perhaps interference with molecular binding-forces—could have torn the satellite apart.

Yet no one had been able to determine whether the suspicion was correct. For Earthsiders there was a body of knowledge called "scientific," which began with steel and steam-engines and continued to go-boards and interstellar ships, but was a continuum at every stage, conditioned by an attitude of mind. If this system got results, the Yanfolk let it be inferred, in their opinion it was in spite of and not because of its postulates: a kind of magic. An Earthsider might argue that his view was correct because his machines worked when you switched them on. A Yannish opponent—not that they decended to this kind of debate—might quote Book Seven of the Mutine Epics and point to the Ring as evidence that that was also "the truth."

The proof of the pudding . . .

He heard a footfall behind him—Shyalee's. Reflexively he turned, expecting to take a cup from her, and found her staring foolishly into the sky. He copied her, and saw the moon.

III

Of those inhabitants of Prell who had been asleep when the moon appeared, almost the first to be awakened were Speaker Kaydad and his present matron . . . to use the conventional term for a Yannish female keeping company with a householding male whose child she had not borne. (But the analysis of Yannish family relationships was complex.)

Their son and daughter—respectively, hers and his—had been among a group of seventeen young people who had passed the evening with Alice Ming and Rayvor. It was their shouts from outside which roused the household.

And seventeen loud voices on the street, dispersed over an area of several square kilometres, were quite enough to waken the entire population by a sort of chain-reaction. As those who had seen the moon alerted those who had not, gloglobes came back to life within

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half an hour of being extinguished, so that the town bloomed like a field of fantastic flowers: blue, red, yellow, green, white. In the enclave the communet buzzed frantically, all the rarely-used emergency circuits coming alive, as the inhabitants woke their friends or applied for explanations from the informat. Human and Yannish, clad and naked, people came out of doors to stare in amazement, abandoning dreams, the watching of tapes, music or making love. Shortly even babes in arms, seized by their parents carried along for fear something might happen while a wall separated them, were lit by the strangeness in the sky.

"Your tireless efforts have, then, been rewarded," Speaker Kaydad's matron said to him in the mode of extreme respect reserved for persons of outstanding individual worth. But he replied in the mode of determined contradiction.

"No. Observe and analyse. That is no moon."

He could not disguise his fury and disappointment.

Indeed, it had become clear within a few seconds of the thing's appearance—at least to those who had bothered to learn about such matters—that this could not be a large heavenly body at a considerable distance. It moved far too fast, and must therefore be close, orbiting well inside the Ring. Even so, it was colossal; no artificial object of such apparent size had been seen in the vicinity of Yan before, unless perhaps in the days ten thousand years before when . . .

The idea stopped there, for most of the watchers.

Having regained his presence of mind, Dr Lem let go the grooved wooden rail of his verandah, at which he had had to clutch to steady himself. Something nuzzled his left leg. Thinking it was Pompy, he said aloud, "Easy, old girl—it's all right!" And reached down to pet her head.

Only his fingers encountered smooth chilly metal, and he realised in annoyance that the house's built-in medical reflexes had dispatched support mechanisms to him. Pompy was still asleep, her elegant whiskers trembling as she breathed.

He pushed the machines aside vigorously enough for them to get the hint, drew a deep breath, and resorted to an ancient yardstick to try and determine the object's angular diameter. Holding his thumb up at the full stretch of his arm, he covered the disc with the nail, and found the latter approximately twice as broad. In other words, the thing subtended about a quarter of a degree. However, being so much brighter than the Ring under which it flew, it seemed larger, and no doubt deceitful memory would later make people swear that it had covered an eighth or more of the sky.

In its wake, as the Ring shed meteors, this too shed tokens of its presence.

They began in the far north, where—as on any similar world—the local sun had stung the molecules of the upper air into activity. Owing to the constant downward sifting of particles from the Ring, there were always vivid aurorae on Yan regardless of the season.

Now, as though a supernal finger had beckoned them equatorwards, the potential gradients of the polar stratosphere stretched into long easy declines down which poured the brilliant dis-

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charges of the arctic night. Huge draping curtains of luminosity shook out their folds along the course of the River Smor, bluish and yellowish and occasionally shifting without warning into deep red. Free radicals sown from above sparked fresh reactions, so that the curtains seemed to draw apart, looping upwards and becoming vast double inverted rainbows with the colours interchanged. On the airy stage for which the aurora now formed a sort of proscenium arch, magnificent pyrotechnics began. Intangible jewels glittered, fiery wheels revolved, blasts of lightning threaded whiter than the eye could bear down the black-with-silver background of the night.

After this phase came another which was totally abstract: a series of elegant swooping curves of colour and light, as though some skilled master of an organ uttering visual rather than auditory music had briefly chosen to explore the harmonic relations between the notes of a trivial theme given to him by a wealthy patron, before attempting to make a more formal structure out of them. Following this sequence, which lasted ten or twelve minutes, there was a new series, a group of signs and portents. A huge fire-breathing monster stirred and spat flame and eventually swallowed its own tail. Next, two armed figures with swords and shields clashed in mid-heaven and dissolved into a flower with blue leaves and a white crown. Finally the entire sky was overspread by a brilliant yellow wheel, which rotated, fading, on its invisible axle and seemed to draw the dark in from its edges as it turned.

Terrified, her almond eyes so wide their slant was lost, her sallow complexion paled to stark ghost-white by her alarm, careless of the fact that she was bare to the waist on the balcony outside her dormicle and that to any of the Earthsiders gathered in the street who happened to glance this way her drooping breasts would not be an exotic marvel as they were to Rayvor-Harry, Alice Ming clutched at ther lover's arm.

"What—what is it?" she whimpered.

Still in the Earth-style clothes he had worn during the visit of the seventeen youthful apes who had spent the evening here, he swallowed hard and tried to think of a reply which would not disappoint her. And could not.

He forced out finally, "I don't know!" The words emerged in Yannish, his grasp of human language destroyed by the shock of what he was saying.

"But your legends! Your ancient tales—your folklore!" Alice was eager to speak; if she didn't, her teeth chattered and the muscles of her jaw vibrated like a plucked fiddle-string. "Don't they tell about the time when your planet had a moon?"

Valiantly, Rayvor-Harry said, "That's all mythical nonsense. You told me so, lots of times."

But that was as far as his self-control extended. From that final declaration of scepticism he slid without intention into reciting a traditional Yannish formula of intercession, not addressed to any god—the Yanfolk, if they had ever worshipped supernatural beings, had long forgotten them—but invoking powers beyond knowledge, beyond science, beyond belief.

Also one witness was Vetcho, who held what was not an office, nor a rank, among the Yanfolk of Prell—because the very notion of authority was foreign to

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Yannish minds—but who behaved in such a manner that, so far as relations with the Earthsiders were concerned, it amounted to the same thing.

His first response was dual, and in real time at that: a facility largely due to his anatomy. With part of him he was thinking as Speaker Kaydad's matron had thought, that this was success after so much trouble. With the rest of him, he was wondering in a hurt tone of mind why the climactic step had been taken without his assistance.

Then the truth dawned. After which: as near as Yanfolk could come to objurgation, or cursing.

More or less, and much less than more, he thought: *Those devils, those fiends! There will be nothing left for us. Must they strip us even of the shadow of the echo of our pride?*

But he was resolved that they should not, even though they were adding this latest mockery to the long toll of insults so far recorded: that they dwelt in plain view of the Mutine Flash, that they set their automatics on the border of the go-board to prevent Yanfolk travelling to other worlds, that they pried into the mystery of the Epics, that they . . .

His matron emerged to join him at that point, and he was un-Yannishly rude to her. And said nothing about the moon not being a moon. Let her find out.

Warden Chevsky was asleep and snoring. Drunk. His wife Sidonie was awake at his side, having tried several times to turn him over so that his mouth would not fall open. The last time he had struck out at her in his sleep and she was now nursing what felt as though it would be visible as a bruise in the morning.

It was not her first failure of the night. She had tried to encourage him to make love when they came to bed, and been rebuffed. Now she sat up against the pillows, moodily hating him.

Is the bastard past it? Or has he acquired a mistress? A Yannish mistress? Would one of those delicate, fragile creatures look twice at him?

For a second or two the imagined spectacle of her husband's gross body conjoined with a Yannish girl made her want to laugh; it was so ridiculous. But the amusement faded quickly. She knew the answer only too well, and it was *yes*. The customs of the natives were—different.

So maybe I ought to do the same.

Short of celibacy, what was the alternative? No one in the enclave, no human male, would consider an affair with her, she was sure. It wasn't just that she was sixty-five and losing her figure; far more important, she was the wife of the Warden.

But one of these young Yanfolk, one of these "apes": he'd see me as a prize. Something exotic, wonderful. And Alice does claim that the Yannish anatomy—

A flash, a gleam, a whole blazing glory of light at the skylight window! She exclaimed and jolted her head up, blinking in disbelief. Her husband went on snoring.

She touched the skylight control and the panes slid back, showing her the sky direct.

Why, that can only be—! Back on Tamar, all those years ago, I remember . . .

No. More likely one of his imitators. But in any case this was an event. She jumped from the bed in high excitement, a cry rising to her lips, meaning to wake her husband even if it involved the risk of being hit again.

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And checked the impulse.

No. Let the liquor-sodden swine be the last to find out. Maybe it'll lead to the loss of his job. I wouldn't weep.

As silently as possible she stole from the room, catching up a gown and stabbing her toes into slippers, and went out on the balcony to enjoy the play of colours while it lasted.

"Pompy, *shut up*," Dr Lem said in the tone he reserved for occasions when he really meant it. The chubble had been complaining because her sense of the fitness of things had been disturbed; this was not the time at which one sat down to the communet. Hurt, but resigned, she let her whiskers dangle dejectedly and folded herself into the sort of small package he recalled from the days when she was a mere kit and he was training her to behave in a human home, a variation on the ostrich principle: *if I can't see you, you can't see me.*

"Hah!" Dr Lem said, wishing it were really that simple. He would have liked this thing in the sky to go away. Very much.

He had suddenly been overwhelmed by a sense of unwanted responsibility. He held no official post in the enclave—indeed, there was only one official post, Chevsky's—but with the passage of time he had become its doyen, and in consequence people tended to look up to him. Moreover, he had the cachet of his profession. Even a small community like this posed problems which now and then drove someone to seek psychiatric help, and he helped as best he could in such cases.

And he felt there were certain individuals who ought at least to realise, as soon as possible, what had happened. His colleague Harriet Pokorod, to start with, the community's medical doctor; Jack and Toshi Shigaraku, joint tutors-in-chief of the little school—there were not very many children here, either because people were understandably reluctant to start a family on a strange planet, or because the habit-patterns of the Yanfolk had affected them, but their position was clearly one of influence; Pedro Phillips, the merchant; Hector Ducci, responsible for everything technical in the enclave and above all for the maintenance of the go-board. . .

All of whom, apparently, were already talking on the communet. At least he was getting the busy signal whichever of them he tried to call.

Warden Chevsky? No, of course not. He's bound to have been the first one notified, and he must have his hands full.

Frustrated, Dr Lem leaned back in his chair. He wanted—needed—to *do* something, even if it was only talk to a friend. Or to the informat, he added, suddenly realising that so far he was going on guesswork and second-hand data. He punched the informat code with trembling fingers, and in a moment discovered not only that he was correct in his conclusions, but that thirty-eight earlier inquirers had beaten him to them.

"What *is* it?" Shyalee whispered at last, having gripped Marc's arm so long and so hard that she had almost cut off the circulation with her fingers.

"It's—well, it's an advertisement," Marc said gruffly. He used the nearest available Yannish word. It meant much more than its literal human counterpart, but in this particular case it was not in the least an exaggeration.

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"An advertisement!" Shyalee cried. "But that's absurd! What's it supposed to advertise?"

"The arrival of . . ." Marc hesitated, wiping his forehead with the hem of his cape. "Well!" he said at length. "Have you ever heard any of us talk about a man called Gregory Chart?"

Eyes wide, mouth wide, she shook her head. That convention had been adopted at the time of the first human contact with Yan, and become a permanent part of the native repertoire of gestures.

"You will," Marc sighed. "No doubt of that."

IV

VIRTUALLY THE ONLY people in Prell and its vicinity who slept that night were infants, who crowed their appreciation of the pretty lights in the sky and relaxed happily in their mothers' arms, and the very old, who drowsed off while muttering dire warnings about celestial signs.

The Yanfolk were not personally but racially acquainted with such matters, and were kept awake by arguments between conservative factions who quoted mysterious passages from the Mutine Epics and other inscrutable sources; and opposing—mostly younger—schools of thought who maintained that here was another admirable manifestation of the superior human culture, this use of the entire welkin as a poster hoarding. It had not taken long for the information Marc had given Shyalee to spread by word of mouth far beyond the circle of her close friends. Perhaps an hour.

But when fuller details followed the first bald summary the arguments abruptly took a different turn.

Three X down, Erik Svitra said to himself, and went blue across the go-board, then purple. He was getting tired, and guide-sequence he had memorised under hypnosis felt as though it would never end. *One X diagonal, and pi to the e . . .*

The board had been singing in F major. Abruptly it hit him with a bucket of nonexistent ice-water and put a smooth steel floor under his feet. He was through.

And about time, Erik thought. If he'd known how long and tough this sequence was, he might have thought twice about making the direct trip to Yan without stopovers. Still, at least the expensive hypnotic instructions had brought him out where he wanted to be. He set down his travel-pack with relief and stared from the board's edge towards the shining Ring he'd seen so many pictures of.

Abruptly he spotted something orbiting beneath it. A moon.

What the—?

He snatched the informat print-out from his pocket and checked it for the umpteenth time. No moon.

Hell, they've sent me to the wrong planet! I'll—I'll sue the bastards!

But tomorrow. He was exhausted. Right now he had to find a place to lodge. Gloomily he shouldered his pack and began to trudge down the hill.

The news, of course, had spread within minutes to all the Earthsiders, not only because so many people had punched the informat for an explanation, and got one, but also because

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several hadn't needed to: Mama Ducci had been on Ilium when Chart came calling, Sidonie Chevsky had been on Tamar, someone else had been on Cinula, someone else on Vail . . . Everybody wanted to stay up and talk about him, and did so until the fantasia overhead died with the advent of dawn.

Meantime, the one exception to the general rule, Warden Chevsky snored.

At sunrise the moon came down from heaven anyway. Dwindling as it descended and shed the space-distorting refractory effects employed to make it seem vast beyond the stratosphere, it was nonetheless still huge when it settled: a plain white globe five hundred metres high, under whose released weight the Plateau of Blaw shuddered like Atlas grown tired of holding up the sky.

Some people claimed that they could sense completion or fulfillment, here on Yan. What Dr Lem sensed was weariness. The very landscape suggested it; since the dissolution of its moon into the Ring, the mountains had begun to lie down under their own weight, and it was a result of this that the land-surface was confined to a single hemisphere. Even the shallow ocean which rolled over the other half of the globe seemed to be stirred as much by the continual bombardment of meteorites as by the sluggish solar tides.

Outside the polar circles there was still one range rugged and high enough to boast permanent snowcaps and glaciers, but only one, last testament to a vigorous mountain-building youth. Over all of Blaw and Hom there was no peak bigger than a hill, much weathered, easy to climb. Moreover Prell had not always been at the mouth of the Smor, but had taken over from seaward towns as they surrendered to the encroaching waters. Because they could not swim without elaborate respiratory aids, the Yanfolk seemed unwilling to struggle with the sea. Now one could lean over the side of a boat on a clear day, fifteen kilometres south of Prell, and peer down into the ruins of what had once been a port. When winter gales made the waves surge aside, the highest towers breached the surface like the worn yellow fangs of a sick old dog.

And this morning, this sunrise, as he sat at his communet and learned more and more relevant facts about the situation the enclave had been pitchforked into—each more dispiriting than the last—he felt fatigue on that same grand scale permeating his very bones. His mind was alert, for he had taken anti-sleep drugs, but no drug ever invented could fight such weariness as could overwhelm a planet.

Vaguely, while he watched the spectacle in the sky, Marc Simon had been aware of comings and goings. He was on the flat roof of his home, where he and Shyalee often slept, after the Yannish manner, during warm weather. It afforded a superb vantage-point.

Calls had come from the street-door, at first soft, later shouted as it became clear that the entire neighbourhood had been aroused anyway. Shyalee had gone to answer, and—so Marc presumed—relayed what he had told her to her friends, probably in garbled fashion. He had ignored these distractions. He was hardly capable of coherent thinking, for he was torn between two utterly opposed reactions.

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On the one hand, it had been said of Gregory Chart that he was the greatest creative artist of all time . . . and there was some evident grain of truth in the claim, inasmuch as no one in history had ever tackled such themes on such a scale. Marc himself had never had a chance to witness one of his performances; he had seen some of the consequences, though, years later, which were still being experienced on Hyrax.

Naturally, anyone would wish to be present during a Chart performance. But if his work on Hyrax was a fair sample, then the impact of his coming here, coming to Yan. . . . !

There was a footfall behind him. A gentle tap on his shoulder. He shrugged it away like an annoying insect.

"Marc," Shyalee said, "it is Goydel who has called."

What? Marc jumped from the cushion on which he had been squatting, Yannish-style. It had taken him a month of practice to achieve that without sending his legs to sleep. And it was true: emerging from the oval opening at the head of the steps giving access to this roof, he recognised the familiar features of his—well, the nearest human term might be "patron," only there was no question of financial assistance involved, only of sponsorship and the granting of opportunities to present an artist's work to an appreciative and discerning audience.

Well, at least he wasn't the one who got killed during shrimashey, Marc thought . . . and realised that that was probably the unspoken fear which had so upset him a few hours ago, caused him to make that stupid gesture with the bowl of *sheyashrim* drug. But there was hardly a mark on Goydel, apart from a small patch of ointment on his forehead, where part of his crest of hair had presumably been torn away.

Impossible to picture this staid, dignified personage in the middle of a heap of writhing, struggling bodies . . . Who did get killed, if anyone? A friend of mine?

But one must not ask. One was permitted to learn only by indirect, oblique routes. And sometimes all the participants survived, after all.

He strode forward, full of apologies that the old man should have had to negotiate the steep stairs. Goydel countered instantly, not in Yannish but in the Earthsiders' tongue, which he spoke with an excellent accent and a good command of idiom.

"No, young friend, I prefer to be up here, believe me. These remarkable displays overhead are not to be missed! Tell, me, is it correct what I have been told, that this announces the arrival of one of your greatest human artists?"

Bustling around in a most un-Yannish manner, Marc was tugging up a cushion for him to sit on, whispering instructions to Shyalee about bringing a jug of morning-brew and some cakes, and generally fussing like a house-proud hostess caught unawares. He mastered all these impulses with an effort, steadied his breathing, and after making certain Goydel was comfortable squatted facing him and composed his limbs into a deliberately relaxed posture. The aurorae were almost over by now, but from them and the lightening east came plenty of light to see each other by.

There was a proper period of silence, terminated when Shyalee had produced the refreshments. Marc said diffidently in Yannish, "As to the personage re-

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sponsible for the lights above us: yes, one might reasonably refer to him as an artist."

In his host's tongue again, from courtesy, Goydel said, "And what *sort* of an artist is he—this man Chart?"

"Why, he's . . ." Marc hesitated, and decided to fall in with Goydel's choice of language. Not that that made it much easier for him to explain.

How do you sum up Chart in half a dozen sentences? You can't. Not in any language!

Still, he must do his best. He said after long reflection, "Well, first of all I should admit that I've never seen him work, but only talked with people who have. I understand that he's—he's an interpreter of dramas on a colossal scale. He tries to actualise a situation so that the people of a planet can live in it for as long as they can afford to pay him. It may be a dream, an ambition. Or it may be a period of past history. Or it may be a choice among a dozen possible courses of future action. I believe his range is enormous."

"It is the first time since the original visit of your species to our world that we have seen a spaceship. He invariably travels in that fashion, not by go-board?"

"Yes, I believe so." Marc licked his lips. He was always ill at ease when talking about interstellar travel with Yanfolk; so many of them envied human freedom to go from star to star, but there was an inflexible rule against non-humans entering a go-board.

"Does he always announce his arrival the same way?"

"I heard that he did on Hyrax. First there was an extra moon in the sky—the moon of Hyrax is red, like old dry meat, and the new one was silvery, as you have seen. Afterwards there were auroral displays, though less elaborate and well-controlled. They showed me tapes."

Of course you'd expect him to refine his techniques over the years . . .

"And in the case you know of, what was the content of the performance?"

"Oh—on Hyrax it was a dream. Which turned sour." Marc grimaced. "About being happy under the rule of the Quain family. Don't ask me for all the details, please. I gather the rulers engaged Chart thinking that he would provide a circus for the people, to reconcile them to their condition, and expecting that afterwards their subjects would be happy to be ground just a little harder to meet his fee. His charges are not low.

"But the dream ended, and the reality took over, and the last I heard the people of Hyrax were still paying."

Goydel gave a nod. Marc realised that there were good reasons why Yanfolk should at once grasp the concepts underlying Chart's work. If there was any historical truth hidden in the obfuscation of Yannish traditional lore, it related to another event for which payment was still being exacted—after millennia.

"By what means does he achieve his effects?" Goydel inquired eventually.

Marc deliberately misunderstood the question. "Why, I believe basically it's a variant of the weather-control techniques employed on many planets, adjusting potential gradients within the natural layers of the atmosphere, then sowing patterns of activated molecules . . ."

His voice died away under Goydel's impassive level gaze, and he covered a momentary fit of embarrassment by

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sipping his own drink—coffee, because morning-brew contained an ascorbic-acid antagonist and an Earthsider who drank it developed scurvy.

"As to the way in which he involves whole planetary populations in his performances, though," he resumed, setting the cup aside, "there I'm afraid I know only the barest outlines. I know he starts by using gross techniques to adjust emotions—weather, again, is an example. Then he provides certain large-scale constructs which condition the reactions of people in their vicinity, either by their mere shape and colour or by subliminal emanations, and he sets the drama itself in motion with programmed volunteers, or androids. If there are mass media, he requisitions them. And I believe he may also use drugs, in drinking-water or air. But I don't imagine anyone fully understands his methods except himself."

"Is he, then, the only practitioner of his art?"

"I believe he has imitators. But none of them is regarded as his equal."

There was a further pause. Goydel said at last, reverting to Yannish, "It would not be wrong to suggest that you are unenthusiastic about this arrival?"

"It would not," March agreed, after unravelling the procession of negatives which decorated the formal hypothetical quasi-optative structure of the sentence. No modern human language could cram so many into so few words.

Next, he expected Goydel to ask him why not. The old man, however, did nothing of the kind. He merely drained his cup and rose.

"Must you go already?" Marc demanded, also standing up. He felt the need to go on talking, to bring into the open some of his misgivings, to try and explain why he was in two minds about Chart's visit. But Goydel, impeccably polite, rebuffed him expertly.

"Your hospitality has been most generous," he said. "At this contrary-to-custom hour for sociable intercourse, however, it would be unbecoming to trespass beyond the limit set by this unforeseen event . . . would it not?"

In Yannish terms at least: yes, it would.

V

THE DISCUSSIONS and arguments flowed pro and con, while the featureless white globe rested on its bed of crushed rock, as though waiting for some giant to come along and roll it tumbling, among the skittle-houses of Prell.

Exhausted, Erik Svitra had laid down his pack-long before reaching the small town whose multicoloured lights he had clearly seen from the crest of the hill on which the go-board was sited. There was some sort of soft growth on the ground here—even by the light of the Ring and these curious aurorae, he couldn't make out details—and a bush overhung a cup-shaped depression, offering shelter. He had at first only meant to rest for a while; in the end, however, he had dozed off.

And was now waking to an itch.

He blinked his eyes open, and found that through a gap in the branches of the bush he had taken refuge under he could see the sun, a few degrees above the horizon, and encircled by just the sort of halo he had expected on Yan. But that had to take second place in his attention. Both his light-brown,

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plump legs were swelling up into a kind of magnified goose-flesh condition, and he had apparently been scratching himself in his sleep, because he had rubbed a small raw patch.

Oh, hell, he thought, and fumbled in his pack for an antidote. *Just my luck. Fresh off the board, and here I've been hit with an allergy already.*

He applied a thin film from a spray-bottle, and was returning it to the pack when he heard footsteps. Cautious, he peered out between the branches, and saw someone coming towards him who was apparently suffering from a bad skin infection, dark patches on both . . .

He caught himself. He had been so tired when he came off the board, he'd convinced himself he was on the wrong planet after all. But if he wasn't, and the Ring, the halo around the sun, and now this—this person who obviously had proper Yannish skin-colouring, indicated that this must indeed be Yan, something very odd was going on.

A pace or two behind the Yannish . . . Girl? Yes, girl, he deduced after consulting his informat printout again. A pace or two behind her, anyhow, a man followed, who had a regular human beard although he wore weird clothing. Erik rose into sight and hailed him.

"Say, friend!"

Both the man and his companion barely glanced his way.

"Say, I'm just off the board! Where can I find a hotel—and who do I report to?"

"Report?" the man echoed. His girl-friend was staring at Erik with a curiously searching expression. Of course, this was the planet where you could . . . But that would have to wait. He was looking forward to checking out the truth behind the rumours, though.

"Yes, report!" Erik scrambled up from the hollow where he had been sleeping, whipped by the branches of the bush—he saw now it had peculiar greyish flowers on it—and confronted them. "See, I'm a freelance drug-tester, and I decided I'd come here and check out this stuff they have, this shay . . . Whatever. So I guess I ought to report to someone, and find a place to lodge."

"They don't have hotels here," the man said curtly. "I don't know you have to report to anybody, either. But I guess if you really want to you could track down Warden Chevsky. Down there in the enclave." He waved vaguely back the way he had come. "Ask anybody where he lives—they'll direct you. Come on, Shyalee."

He caught the girl's hand and hurried her onward. Staring after them in dismay, wanting to shout out what he thought of their rudeness to a new arrival, Erik saw the monstrous looming bulk of the ship for the first time.

What in the *galaxy*. . . ?

He licked his lips nervously, glancing around. On the track from the town, he spotted more people coming this way. He could ask them. Shouldering his pack, he waited for them to pass.

What was that up ahead? Dr Lem snapped his fingers to try and make Pompy hurry—the chubble, who clearly felt she deserved a larger ration of sleep, was in a cantankerous mood and kept falling behind—and took advantage of the fact that there was a metre-high bank beside the path at this point to gain a better view. Surely it couldn't be a crowd! There simply were not crowds on this planet; assemblies of large numbers of people in one place at one time were contrary to Yannish custom, and there were only three

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hundred twenty-odd humans, many of them children.

But it was a crowd. And more and more people were hastening to join it.

He hadn't looked back since leaving his house. Now he did, and discovered that in his turn he was being followed, by Jack and Toshi Shigaraku and—apparently—the entire roster of pupils at the enclave's little school, in a straggling line. Many of them knew Pompy, and on sighting her came running over with cries of delight.

"What is going on?" Dr Lem demanded as Jack Shigaraku came in earshot.

The tutor gave a shrug. "Well, obviously it was pointless trying to run regular classes today. So I ran through the article 'Chart, Gregory' on the encyclopedia setting of the informat, and here we are on the way to an unscheduled open-air lesson."

Around him the children grinned broadly.

"Has anything happened?" Toshi asked. "I mean since the ship landed. We heard it was down."

Falling in beside them, Dr Lem shook his head. "No, I've been trying to reach Hector Ducci—he'd know about this kind of thing if anyone would. I don't believe a ship has put down here since the initial contact. And I also tried to talk to Chevsky. But no one's answering on his 'net."

"Probably out here already," Toshi said. "Everybody else seems to be."

Ahead, the cries and laughter of the children had attracted the attention of a number of Yanfolk, bound in the same direction, who gazed at them curiously. They did not educate their children in groups; instead, they transferred them—starting the day after birth—along an incredibly subtle network of relations, which might easily take them to a dozen cities or villages, to let them absorb gradually the "life-style" of their race. Commonly this process might be over by the age of forty—the Yanfolk were long-lived, and the whole tempo of their existence seemed to be slowed down to correspond. Speaker Kaydad, for example, was known to be nearly two hundred, Earth-years. Occasionally it ended sooner; Shyalee, Marc's mistress, was reputedly only thirty-four. Very rarely it lasted a great deal longer; Speaker Kaydad had a son, in addition to the daughter currently living with him and his matron for the year, and that young man had not become a householder until he was forty-seven.

No, Dr Lem thought. *Groups to them don't have anything to do with education. They signify something else entirely.*

He felt himself shiver, despite the warmth of the morning.

His fat dark face traversed by beetling brows and magnificently menacing mustachios, Hector Ducci swore to himself in his ancestral Italian. He was a big, heavy-set man, but in spite of his weight he was active, and he had been the first to arrive here, near the spot where the ship had set down. He had thought it his responsibility; he was, after all, the go-board supervisor as well as being in charge of the enclave's technical facilities generally, and ships were so rare these days no routine existed to cope with them. But they presumably fell under the head of on-world arrivals when they landed. So here he was, and everyone else appeared to have followed him, to this last outcrop of the yellowish, stratified rock consti-

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tuting the Plateau of Blaw. On foot, of course. It was the standard Yannish mode of travel; the Yanfolk themselves thought nothing of walking for a fortnight, dawn to dusk.

However, he had been here for well over an hour, and the ship had just sat there, featureless, doing nothing and ignoring the calls he addressed to it over his portable communet extension. He had studied it with binox, and he was none the wiser.

Where the hell had Warden Chevsky got to? This was his pigeon, surely! What was a Warden for, if not to deal with—with whatever this kind of thing was?

Crisis, he thought with glum satisfaction. *Yes, that's what it's bound to be.*

He raised his binox again and swept the entire field of view with them, noting—to his surprise—that there were now far more Yanfolk assembling at the edge of the ship's shadow than humans. It was humans who were supposed to be the insatiably curious species, the rubberneckers. When told about their degraded cousins in the southern hemisphere, the wilders, the Yanfolk had allegedly shown no surprise and very little interest, on the grounds that "something of the kind was to be expected."

Still, presumably most of these would be apes. He didn't know enough of them personally to be sure through binox.

On impulse, he turned clear around, meaning to look down towards Prell, and checked; he had glanced in the direction of the go-board, and it was active. A harsh blue haze surrounded it, and there was the characteristic teeth-jarring hum.

"Zepp!" he shouted, and his eldest son Giuseppe, eighteen, as yet slim but by his dark hair and heavy bones due to turn into a fair copy of his father one day, strolled out of a clot of people fifty metres away.

"What is it?" he called.

"Go see who that is coming off the board!"

"Must I? Is it so important?"

Binox levelled, Ducci waited to be able to answer; the haze was fading. And there was . . .

"Hell, yes! It's important!" he exclaimed. "That's the last thing we need right now! It must have been tipped off."

"What is it?" Giuseppe hurried up to him and seized the binox. "Oh, it's only a news-machine," he said after a pause. "What's wrong with that?"

"You'll find out," Ducci said grimly. He had his own premonitions of what was going to emerge from all this, and they weren't pretty. "Get over there and inactivate it."

"But that's illegal! They're allowed to go anywhere, if they don't invade privacy," Giuseppe pointed out.

"I don't mean wreck it," his father snapped. "Just delay it for a while." Retrieving the binox, he studied the thing's angular, glinting form, long legs tipped with climbing-hooks and suction-pads disposed around the self-powered motor unit and the cluster of extensible sensors. "Luckily it's one of the old marks, an Epsilon, not a recent one like a Kappa or Lambda. It'll take a while to orient itself. Go on—feed it a rumour or something, send it on a false trail. It's important!"

Scowling, Giuseppe moved away with no detectable enthusiasm.

Still no sign of life from the ship, Ducci discovered when he turned

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around again. But more and still more people were pouring up the track from the town, including the entire roster of schoolchildren under the leadership of their tutors, the Shigarakus, and... He had to check twice with the binox before he could convince himself. Lord! Wasn't that the Speaker himself, Kaydad, and Vetcho too, the man who acted as his deputy, or assistant? You'd expect to see all the young apes out here, but never in a million years the old, conservative, hard-liners like them! He'd tried to be friendly towards them when he first arrived, ten or eleven years ago, thinking that they'd be interested in Earthsider gadgetry even if only because of what it did. But they'd been so frigid and distant, he'd given up.

He wasn't normally an imaginative man. But there was something about this situation that made his scalp crawl.

Crazy place! Crazy people! Not for the first time, Erik Svitra wondered nervously whether he had really got over that stuff he'd discovered on Groseille, that *gifmak* drug that cross-connected the perceptual channels in the mind. It had been the one big success of his career, and staked him to this life as a freelance. But they'd had to cure him of it, of course. At least, they'd said they had. Finding himself here, in this weird situation, made him uncertain about that. Here were all these people, both human and native, getting out of town just to go look at that starship up there—big, sure, but...

"Hell, what's a starship?" Erik grumbled aloud. "Might as well go look at a steam locomotive! In fact that could be more fun, because they had things that like whizzed around all the time!"

Still, he appeared to have located his destination. He had been directed six or eight times so far, and part of his route had taken him through what he deduced must be the Yannish section of town, where small ovoidal structures with flattened, partly-enclosed roofs stood with their doors open and seemingly nobody at home; then over this rise—which made his pack feel abominably heavy, but the informat printout had warned him there were no moving pedways or rented antigrav trolleys here—and now down into the relatively familiar, reassuring environment of the so-called "enclave": houses that were practically hovels by the standards he was used to, having at most two storeys, but recognisably human-designed.

And this was the address he'd been given for Warden Chevsky. A house larger than the average, with a big balcony, and a regular Earth-style annunciator at the door. He hit the contact-plate and called Chevsky's name.

Shortly, he heard a yell from inside: "Sid! Damn you, go answer that!"

There being no sign of "Sid," Erik hit the plate again. More yelling. Then, on the balcony over the door, a gross man appeared, belting a robe about him, hair tousled, eyes red, squinting at the daylight as though he had a severe hangover. Erik judged, with his expert's eye, that it was due to alcohol, not something decently exotic.

With a barely-concealed trace of contempt, he said, "Are you Warden Chevsky?"

"Hell, yes!" The man rubbed his eyes. "Where the hell is my wife? Where's—well, where's everybody?" he added, seeming to take in the completely empty street for the first time.

"Oh, they're all crazy," Erik shrugged. "Gone out of town to look

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at some damned starship or other. Now, look! I'm Erik Svitra, and I'm—"

"What starship?" Chevsky broke in.

"I don't know!" Erik snapped. He was getting annoyed with this planet. Then: "Oh, I guess I do," he admitted. It wouldn't be politic to get on bad terms, right at the start of his stay, with this character they called the Warden. Some places didn't look kindly on people in his profession.

"Yeah, someone did mention something—someone I asked directions of, coming here," he continued. "There was some sort of show in the sky, they said, and then this thing came down around dawn, and the owner's supposed to be . . . Cart? No: Chart. Or some such name."

For an instant Chevsky looked at him with such fury he flinched, expecting the man to hurl himself bodily over the balcony. Then he vanished inside, and slammed the windows.

"Hey!" Erik shouted. And then again: "Hey!"

There was no response.

"Well, shit!" he said at last, and hoisted his pack again and turned away at random. "Sooner I get off this crazy world, the better!"

Only how? Unless he made a strike here, perhaps with this stuff called *sheyashrim* that the natives were supposed to use, how could he afford to pay to have himself programmed with the hypnotically-ingrained directions for a go-board trip to some more promising planet?

"I wish I'd never come here," he told the warm spring air.

Besides, he was hungry, and his feet hurt.

VI

WHAT WOULD BE the best solution to all this? To appeal to Earth and have Chart's ship forcibly removed? That question throbbed in Dr Lem's mind as he toiled up the last few metres of incline to the plateau-edge from which a clear sight could be had of Chart's ship.

But he didn't have any authority to ask for that. He doubted if anyone did, except possibly Chevsky—and Chart carried a great deal of weight. He was famous! A galactic celebrity! Not the sort of person the ghostly, ineffectual grasp of Earthside government could pick up bodily from a distant planet and send on his way with a slapped backside.

Even if the idea proved feasible, the sight of a major police action—and shifting a ship that size by force was bound to be a major action—would doubtless open whole new vistas in the Yanfolk's conception of mankind. Ill-founded it might be, but the rather chilly respect the natives accorded these barely civilised creatures, humans, for the sake of their manifest material achievements was better than the available alternatives.

On the other hand, anything Chart did would entrain consequences quite as devastating, and infinitely less predictable . . .

Well, some sort of crunch was probably inevitable. Life in the enclave was far from typical of most human planets, being quasi-pastoral, almost idyllic. Even that much contact, however, had produced a serious disruption in Yannish society. Those pitiable "apes"—he formed the term in his mind with distaste, although he knew it was at worst

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patronising, because hardly any of the inhabitants of the enclave could ever have seen a real ape—they were only the most conspicuous symptom.

The nub of the problem was there, though. When humans discovered Yan, they had at least had some data from previous encounters with non-human intelligence to guide them. Although no other star-flying races had been encountered, at least seven were known with whom it was possible to communicate fairly well. There was even a convincing theory to explain why these were all bipedal, bisexual and binocular.

Also there were non-humanoid creatures which were suspected of being intelligent in some private fashion . . . but only time, and long patient study, would show whether the suspicion was correct.

Granted, the Yanfolk had been comparatively lucky. Their incredibly close resemblance to humans had preserved them from being turned into exhibits, or laboratory specimens. What men had learned about some of the other races had been garnered by explorers sent out by—for example—the Quains, those despots whom Chart had overthrown on Hyrax, answerable to no one but themselves and their bosses, and was the result of kidnapping ("random sampling"), psychological torture ("stress response analysis") and poisoning ("metabolic research").

But then, when it was discovered that humans and Yanfolk could make love. . .

Well, that was just one of the improbable facts to conjure with. Additionally, they were highly peaceable. Yet they endured the depredations of *shrimashey,* commitment to a brutal, random, violent means of population-control! And if one sought to get to grips with the reason, one had to travel by way of such human concepts as "holy," "sacred," "taboo." Not what you would predict for a rational species.

Yet rational they certainly were—and intelligent, and self-aware. At some time in the past, as the wats, mandalas and menhirs demonstrated, they had been technically more advanced, in some fields, than mankind was now. But they appeared to have lost interest in that kind of thing. Their society had been stable for millennia. Custom ruled them, not governments, and they had no officials or administrators—just an informal clique of certain persons who were *hrath,* or "optimal:" in other words, peculiarly able to convey the sense of "rightness" or "propriety" to the next generation.

Nonetheless, when the arrival of aliens from the stars posed a brand-new problem, they reacted promptly and with perfect aptness. They singled out one of their number and called him *Elgadrin:* "one-who-speaks-for."

And . . .

Dr Lem blinked in astonishment. He had separated from the tutors and their retinue of children, and was now looking around for someone he could share his forebodings with: Ducci, perhaps, or the merchant Pedro Phillips. But his gaze had landed instantly on the unmistakable features of Speaker Kaydad, accompanied by Vetcho, and both of them were starting in his direction, bowing politely.

He wanted to turn and run, but he couldn't. At his side Pompy—overjoyed by all the attention the children had lavished on her—crooned with content-

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ment. He wished he could get so much simple pleasure out of life.

The Speaker himself was a trifle taller than the Yannish average, his height enhanced by his crest of blue-black hair, which fanned out over his crown from pointed ear to pointed ear and down his nape to the level of his armpits. Lack of the normal widow's-peak over each eye was almost the only token, apart from his slow gait and speech, by which one might have guessed his extreme age. He was, of course, scarred in several places, and two of his fingers had been broken and healed crooked, but that was the inevitable consequence of *shrimashey*, and could have happened to him any time from sixty onward.

Like all his kind, he looked at a casual glance as though he wore a mask. His forehead, scalp and eye-ridges were pale, a light wooden colour between white and brown. Both his cheeks, however, were of a red shade like seasoned mahogany, and the whole of the rest of his skin was patched with palm-sized areas of the same hue networked with irregular lines of the lighter colour. There was a hypothesis to the effect that while humans had evolved among scrub and along seashores, Yanfolk were of glade stock, but there was no proof of this, Yanfolk being remarkably uninterested in their ancestry. It was a guess based on analogies with Earthside creatures such as giraffe and zebra.

Apart from his pigmentation, he differed visually from a human male in having tufts of hair at knees and elbows, and if he had been nude one could have seen the genital proboscis which, in a sense, symbolised the whole series of difficulties radiating from this contact between species.

Of course, the deeper one went the more marked the differences became. His liver-kidney was at the front of his abdomen; his heart was in his pelvis; on either side of it, in front of the hip-joints, were the male rudiments of twin organs which in the female corresponded to breasts, nourishing the new-born infant with a clear serum from special glands adjacent to the intestine. And his lungs were at his sides, drawing air directly through spiracles between the ribs; like a bagpipes, they had continual throughput. Sound to talk with was generated by a tympanal membrane and relayed through resonating chambers in the gullet, giving a rather pleasant, if monotonous, timbre; in Kaydad's case, resembling a 'cello droning away on a single note.

Those superficialities apart, however, it never ceased to amaze Dr Lem just how closely their two species resembled one another. Limbs, spine, skull, eyes, mouth—the list of likenesses was far longer than the tale of contrasts.

Who cares, Dr Lem had always thought, *if they can talk for an hour without pausing for breath? Just so long as their brains shape concepts we can grasp!*

And then he glanced past the approaching Speaker and saw the inevitable band of apes trailing behind Alice Ming and her lover: determinedly imitating Earthly clothing, fidgeting to try and keep concealed the breathing-slits cut in their upper garments, somehow surrounded by the permanent aura of resentment which, he knew, was due to their not being allowed to visit other planets.

Perhaps, he thought now, *it isn't a good thing after all?*

But at least the glimpse of these apes

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had given him a clue to the reason why Kaydad was seeking him out, to talk with him.

Kaydad's notoriously a conservative type, not as chauvinistic as Vetcho or as introverted as—what's his name?—Goydel, but a great respecter of the status quo. If someone has told the Yanfolk about Gregory Chart, I bet the youngsters are all for having him perform here, and I bet that's the last thing Kaydad's generation want: some arrogant Earthling meddling in their prized ancient lore!

Because that was the only thing which could have tempted Chart here. He was certain his deduction was right.

And this could lead to a satisfactory conclusion after all. Smiling, he greeted Kaydad with hand outstretched.

"Anything happened yet, papa?" Guiseppe Ducci panted as he hurried up to his father.

"Speaker Kaydad just cornered Doc Lem over there," Ducci grunted, binox still to his eyes as though they had become glued there. "And—"

"About the ship, I mean!" Guiseppe interrupted.

"No, nothing." And, suddenly remembering, Ducci rounded on him, at first forgetting to lower the binox, then peeling them away with a sucking noise. They had left big curved grooves on the upper edges of his cheeks.

"Did you fix the news-machine?" he demanded.

"Oh, sure!" Guiseppe laughed. "It's old, like you said. Sort of goofy. Too many trips across the go-board, maybe. It went into the usual routine—'What events of galactic note have occurred here. . . . ?' All that crap. So I sent it down into Prell, using the major population centre circuit. It'll be tied up for hours trying to figure what disaster emptied the town."

"Good boy," Ducci said, clapping him on the shoulder.

"Morning, Hector—morning, Zepp," a worried-sounding voice said, and they turned to find Pedro Phillips, the enclave's merchant, approaching them. "Say, have we had any confirmation that that's Chart aboard the ship?"

He rubbed his hands together reflexively. He was almost a paradigm of the merchant type, a portly man, though not as stout as Ducci, with a too-ready smile and a keen mind.

"I've been trying to get acknowledgements out of him," Ducci said, hefting his communet extension. "So far, not a word."

"I see." Phillips frowned. "I'm beginning to wonder if it is Chart in there, you know. I mean, I can't see what would bring him here. Surely he doesn't imagine three hundred of us in the enclave can afford his rates? And as for the Yanfolk hiring him—well, how'd *they* pay him?"

Ducci nodded. Yannish currency did exist, but it related to a complex and subtle system of personal obligations, not to what humans would call a financial transaction.

"I guess he could just have come to look the planet over," Giuseppe offered. "Like a visit."

"Not in a million years," Phillips declared, and Ducci nodded agreement, tugging at his mustachios and frowning dreadfully. No, it couldn't just be a visit. Star-travel was not a cheap pastime, even for someone like Chart—if there was anybody like him—who signed contracts with continents and spoke as an equal with the governments of planets.

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"Ever seen him working?" he asked Phillips. The merchant shook his head.

"Can't say I want to, either."

"Oh, I do!" Giuseppe exclaimed. "Mama was on Ilium when he came—you know about that?" he added to Phillips in parenthesis. "And she says it was wonderful!"

"Well, it's not up to us, anyhow," his father said after a pause. "You saw that Doc Lem is over there talking to the Speaker? I bet I know what they're discussing. The apes might want Chart to put on a show here, but the old folk—hell, no!"

"I sure hope you're right," Phillips muttered.

Since his belly was even emptier than the houses, Erik Svitra had finally decided to take the risk of helping himself to some food. He'd found a locally-made bread, with a good flavour, and a wedge of something cheese-like, strong but edible. There was a mouthful of it on the way down when he heard a tapping at the door. He jumped, inhaled a crumb, coughed, blew a wet mixture of bread and cheese all over the table he was sitting at, and the world dissolved into a swirling blur as his eyes filled with tears.

"It's okay!" he forced out as soon as he could. "I was just hungry—I'll pay for what I . . ."

But his vision had cleared by that time, and he was able to make out the nature of the intruder: an elderly Epsilon news-machine, of a type he had often encountered while crossing the go-board.

"Well!" he said sourly. "I guess I'm the only news in town today, hm?"

The machine said, seeming agitated as it wove its sensors back and forth in a complex pattern, "Sir, since it would appear you are the sole survivor of the catastrophe which has emptied this town of its inhabitants *á la* the apocryphal ocean-going vessel, *Marie-Celeste*, kindly inform me if you can the nature of the said event."

"Catastrophe?" Erik blinked rapidly several times. "What catastrophe? Everyone's gone out of town to look at a starship that landed. Belonging to"—he searched for the name again, located it—"Gregory Chart, I think they told me. Say, I—"

But the machine had reacted in the most extraordinary manner. It had withdrawn its sensors, stood trembling for a moment, and then spun around in its own length and departed at a headlong run.

"What a world," Erik sighed. "Drives even machines crazy!"

He went back to his bread and cheese.

VII

THE SHIP HAD LAIN for so long that hardly anybody now was paying it much attention. It came as a shock when without preamble a vastly amplified but pleasantly inflected voice suddenly rang out all around it.

"Good morning! This is Gregory Chart. Forgive me for having taken so long to confirm what you doubtless already suspected, but after a lengthy interstellar voyage there are certain essential routine procedures to attend to."

The haloed sun was well clear of the horizon by this time. Oddly, both humans and Yanfolk seemed to be approaching the ship no closer than the fringe of its blurred shadow. And they

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had not surrounded it on all sides, but predominantly on the side nearer Prell, forming a rough horseshoe. All the watchers now, without exception, turned to face the source of the words.

"I believe that—yes, there he is. A friend of a friend of mine is present, I discern, who happens also to be a prominent member of your community. While we are not, regrettably, yet in a position to mingle with you, we'd like to invite him aboard straight away. When Dr Yigael Lem has finished his current conversation. . . ?"

A section of the ship's hull slid back, or dissolved—it happened so quickly, the naked eye could not determine which. A pale grey access ramp licked out like the tongue of a chubble, to touch the irregular rocky ground. Down this ramp a vast mass of roses spilled, and a fanfare roared from a score of amplified trumpets. Some of the Yannish apes clapped their hands gleefully; that was another convention they had copied from Earthsiders.

Next, kicking the flowers aside with careless boots, appeared an honour guard of soldiers two metres tall, in black skin-hugging uniforms with high red shakos on their heads. They took station either side of the ramp, five deep, and at a barking word of command slammed their weapons into salute position. Drums rattled thunderously as a prelude to the emergence of a band of musicians in leopard-skins, playing a four-square march tune with a crude elemental pulse, who wheeled about at the foot of the ramp and divided into two groups, facing each other and marking time.

"Well, who would have thought it?" Giuseppe Ducci marvelled. He had been much impressed by the account his mother had given of Chart's work on Ilium. "Old Dr Lem—knowing somebody as famous as that!"

"He only knows somebody he knows," his father corrected absently, and went on staring through his binox, so that he did not notice the scowl his son bestowed on him.

It had taken Chevsky an eternity to make himself presentable: to shower, to dress neatly in the proper uniform, to organise the decorations on it, to fix his hangover, to cope with a depilator which kept trying to wander off across his scalp and carve deep ruts in his hair instead of confining itself to his cheeks and chin. He was as sweaty and ill-tempered at the end of the process as he had been at the beginning.

Stumbling up the rough track leading to the place where the ship had landed, he heard the blaring of the fanfare, and cursed his wife to the uttermost hells of every planet he had ever heard of.

"We would not wish to delay your meeting with this friend of your friend," Speaker Kaydad said. That degree of acquaintance, in Yannish terms, was one of the closest; they tracked such contacts to the eighth degree as a matter of course.

Dr Lem forced a smile. It was hard. He was aware that everybody's eyes were on him—the eyes of such a crowd as probably had not been seen on Yan since the arrival of the first Earthsider ship, if then—and he hated the sensation of being . . . What was the ancient phrase? Oh, yes: "in the beam."

Still, there was no alternative. He took his leave mechanically and set off towards the ship's ramp with Pompy, as ever, at his heels. The curve of the

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vessel loomed over him, its scale provoking the irrational fear that it might roll over him and crush him into a little wet smear. Behind its limb he saw a particularly brilliant meteorite stab down from the Ring towards Kralgak, visible against the daylight sky. He wished he hadn't noticed that. It was too much like an omen. This vast ship also had dropped out of heaven.

When he arrived within twenty metres of them, the honour guard and the band turned to face him, saluting a second time. He wondered optimistically whether Chart had picked on this approach because he believed Yan to be a backward planet. It was a slim hope. But any hope was better than none at all right now.

The instant he set foot on the ramp it began to carry him smoothly upwards, and Pompy also. Astonished, the chubble sat down, all her feet planted firmly on what should have been but was not solid ground, and let out a yowl of complaint. Bending absently to comfort her, he picked up one of the roses and examined it with a connoisseur's eye. Amazing. "Peace," still breeding true after all these centuries.

Pompy licked it, and decided she didn't like that, either. She snuggled close against his leg for reassurance.

At the top of the ramp he found himself in a place not so much a lock, or even a hallway, as a grotto. From overhead draped stalactites hung, reminding him of the curtain effect which had opened last night's auroral display, lit from concealed sources to produce a bewildering range of light and shade. Water was running somewhere, and a lemony scent pervaded the air.

From among stone pillars flanking

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him, girls appeared in filmy robes, all beautiful, all graceful, who whispered welcome to him in a hundred soft individual voices. One in pale blue confronted him and urged him caressingly forward. He complied with a glance over his shoulder, and saw that the entrance to the ship had closed, as though it had never existed.

He looked again at the girl escorting him, meaning to put a question to her, and gave a gasp. He was no longer looking at a lovely blonde in a blue gown, but at a creature with green fangs and eyes like the glow of putrescent meat. A blast of brimstone assailed him, making his nostrils and throat sting; a braying noise like a mad donkey rang in his ears, and the hard floor under his feet turned to squelchy, nauseating mud.

Darkness fell.

But, paradoxically, Pompy continued to walk at his side, leaning slightly on his leg.

Hmm!

Dr Lem said after a pause, "There's no need to try and impress me, you know. And apparently you can't impress my chubble."

"Really?" a light voice countered from nowhere, in which sarcasm mingled with amusement. "Well, then, I'll stop the show. Although not many people benefit from an exclusive performance directed by Gregory Chart, and I can assure you the opportunity will not recur."

Light sprang up, and there was no sign of the grotto or the girls. Dr Lem found himself in a huge plain open volume flanked by the supporting girders of the ship, facing and looking up towards a sort of translucent bubble from which the light emanated. On the front of the bubble, colossally magnified and distorted, was the face of a man with a beak-like nose, deep-set eyes, thick slightly shiny lips, skin like old parchment oiled and stretched on a frame of secondhand bone.

Pompy didn't like that either, and said so, very faintly.

"So you're Yigael Lem," said the ten-metre-high face. "Doyen of the human enclave here, so they tell me . . . Take the ascensor on your right, if you please."

The face began to shrink, drawing away. Head was joined by shoulders, then chest and arms, then a whole figure, still diminishing. Within the translucent globe, for one brief second, it looked as though some dreadfully overdue foetus were floating in luminous amniotic fluid.

Pompy absolutely refused to mount the ascensor, so he had to pick her up. Fortunately chubbles, although bulky, were light. Cradling her on his left arm, Dr Lem studied the globe in which Chart presented himself, and realised that it was the eye on the front of the ship's brain, pineally sunk inside the cranium of the hull. Its bulbous transparent surface was networked with the spider-tracery of non-refractive vidscreens; he counted automatically, found forty by thirty—twelve hundred possible different points of view which could be cast before Chart to make an insectile mosaic of the world.

Behind him was its retina: a panel four metres high on and through which he could dictate the course of his illusions, by speech, touch, throwing a shadow or any other means, as the whim took him. The rods and cones of sensors

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tactile, sonic, heat-responsive—for all Dr Lem knew, capable of detecting impulses directly from a human nervous system—jutted towards him, finer than fur.

The platform on which the ascensor debouched was overlooked by a railed gallery. Leaning on the rail, staring down at him, was a woman with a Salvadoran merlin on her wrist, a lovely savage creature of blood-red, green and grey. Impatient of its hood, it rustled its wings with a tinkle of the bells on its jesses.

The woman, strangely enough, was also hooded. But that was a fashion on certain planets, he had heard.

A chair appeared on the platform, fatly padded. Chart's voice, disembodied, invited him to sit down, and he complied, soothing Pompy, who had spotted the merlin and reacted badly. The curving wall of what he now thought of as the eye deformed Chart himself into a series of warped bows, as though his long bones had been softened and his whole body shaped anew under a roller, but it could be seen that he was thin, and that he was plainly dressed in a blue coat without ornament except a monogram in gold.

Dr Lem felt as though his mind were darting back and forth inside his skull, a mouse in a cage, finding no gap in the wire. Chart watched him lazily, making the translucent globe surrounding him seem like the objective of a microscope and his visitor a gratifying specimen.

Ask who our mutual friend is. . . ? Trivial. No, there's only one important question I must put.

Abruptly Dr Lem found his voice, and spoke up. "What brings you to Yan, Mr Chart?"

"This, chiefly," Chart said, and reached to his right with an arm that briefly elongated into a horrible curved line, then returned to near-normal bringing with it a cuboidal shape. Dr Lem recognised it at once, but was taken aback; it was so out of keeping with the advanced technical environment of this ship.

"A book?" he said uncertainly.

"Yes, a book! And one I feel sure you must know. Oh—I'm sorry; perhaps it's at an awkward angle for you to read the title and author's name." He turned the large oblong volume so that its spine was visible and well lit.

"Why, it's Marc Simon's version of the Mutine Epics!"

"Yes, indeed," Chart said with a smile. "Unusual to find even a poet's work being published in book form nowadays, isn't it? I'm told that it's due, in Simon's case, to the very limited demand for—but I digress. I was answering your question, wasn't I?"

At the distant edge of Dr Lem's awareness he fancied he could hear landslides. He said eventually, stroking Pompy with one hand all the time because the chubble was trembling, "You're not acquainted with the author?"

"Not yet. I intend to meet him. I presume he can be located, even though his publishers tell me he lives among the Yanfolk and not in the enclave. That must account for the insight of his translations, I suppose. To my inexpert eye they seem brilliant."

Dr Lem gave a distracted nod.

"Even though he has—ah—gone native, I doubt if he can be so withdrawn as to refuse to meet me. Or is he? Have I made my trip in vain?"

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"Uh . . ." Dr Lem wanted to wipe his face; it was prickly with sweat, although the temperature here was mild and pleasant. He had assumed, directly he was shown the book, that Marc was the friend of a friend Chart had referred to, but if he had had a chance to reflect, he would have realised that was out of the question—he hadn't seen Marc among the crowd outside, but it was beyond doubt that Shyalee would have insisted on him coming here. So Chart could have called for him at once.

Who, then. . . ?

But the silence was dragging on unbearably. He said with an effort, "No, I imagine he'll be delighted that you like his work . . . However, you have scarcely come scores of parsecs for a social call."

"Admitted," Chart said with a chuckle.

"Then—"

"Oh, there's no need to beat about the bush with me, Dr Lem," Chart said with a sudden access of weariness. "I'm here because I'm alive and in good health, and I've been everywhere and done almost everything else. I'm looking for a new audience offering a new challenge."

The landslide in Dr Lem's imagination turned to the crash of galaxies. He set his shoulders back, conscious of how ridiculous a figure he must cut: small and thin, against that vastly magnified form in the globe, with the furry chubble draped across his chest like a stole.

He said, "You must not come looking for it here."

"And why not?"

"Because . . . Well, because I have been on Hyrax. And how long ago were *you* there? Sixty years?"

"Ah, Hyrax!" Chart echoed softly. "Yes, some have said that was my masterpiece. But I can't live in the shade of past achievements, you know. For me, the next one is always going to be my best."

"The next one will have to be somewhere other than on Yan," Dr Lem insisted. "With the example of what you've done to disrupt human worlds before us, we dare not risk—"

Abruptly Chart's expression was very stern; his eyes narrowed, his lips pressed into a thin line.

"Since when has this planet been your property? I didn't come here to talk with Dr Lem, or any other human. I came here to perform for the Yanfolk, and what I do will be entirely up to them."

Dr Lem sat very still. Because he knew what the decision of the Yanfolk was going to be—Speaker Kaydad had come to tell him, to ask for his support. Against all the odds, against the logic which had brought him to the contrary conclusion at once, not just the Earth-worshipping youngsters but also the grave, conservative elders *did* want Gregory Chart to perform on Yan.

Perhaps that noise in his mind wasn't the clash of galaxies after all. Perhaps it was smaller, but closer: the shattering of a moon.

VIII

At long last Dr Lem said, "So the temptation to play at being a god has finally got the better of you, has it?"

For an instant he thought he had contrived to make Chart lose his temper; he leaned forward within his globe, and his head and shoulders deformed towards the hugeness Dr Lem

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had first seen, the monstrous embryonic forehead looming over the small full lipped mouth.

He recovered quickly. But there had been that brief breach in his composure, and Dr Lem resolved to exploit it if he could.

"To play at being a god, did you say? Dr Lem, I expected more insight from a man like you. You are a psychologist, are you not? Then you should be able to recognize my particular breed of ambition. It's not in the least megalomaniac. It's—well, the drive towards maximum realisation of my capacities. I told you: I've done almost everything I've ever wanted to. There's very little left that offers me a fresh challenge."

"Your existing audiences have grown bored with you, then? Or have your imitators overtaken you and squeezed you out?" Dr Lem made the words deliberately sarcastic, hoping to wound Chart's *amour propre.*

But they glanced off him harmlessly, for he laughed.

"It must be the fact that you've spent too long among the Yanfolk. I'm told they're fantastically courteous and peaceable. You've forgotten how to frame an insult, haven't you? Not that there are many insults which can touch me . . . Still, I'll dispose of your objections anyhow. It may simplify matters.

"No, I have not been 'squeezed out' by any imitators. I have some. They are all inferior. My audiences are not bored with me; every world where humans have settled has hired me at least once, and every single one is begging me to come back—yes, before you interrupt, that does include Hyrax!"

"I find that hard to believe," said Dr Lem.

"Do you? Yes, I can see why." Chart rubbed his chin with a horribly distorted hand. "I presume you were there after my visit?"

"Yes."

"Had you also been there before?"

Dr Lem swallowed and shook his head.

"I doubted that you had. Under the Quains there was little chance to visit the planet." Chart made an expansive gesture. "I'll tell you how I saw it when I first arrived: a devilish tyranny, excused on the grounds that it offered 'security' and 'peace.' Every man, woman and child on Hyrax was hung about with invisible fetters, branded the private property of Elias Quain as surely as if a hot iron had been seared into their cheeks. True or false?"

"So you're presenting yourself as a disinterested liberator?" gibed Dr Lem. But his heart was not in the words, and his tone betrayed him.

"I am not. The people of Hyrax paid me, every penny of the sum agreed by the Quains. They felt it was well worth bleeding themselves in their own interests for a change, after so many centuries of being bled by their rulers. They were paying in arrears, and they admitted it, for their own stupidity and sloth."

"If you feel proud of rescuing people from that sort of predicament, are there no other chances for you to do so?" Dr Lem countered. "I could name half a dozen worlds where the situation—"

"So could I, so could I, so could I!" Chart cut in. "But I've just told you: that is not what I am. I did it once, almost incidentally. Why should I do it again, even if I am proud that I was instrumental in freeing Hyrax? I don't repeat myself—I leave repetition to my

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silly imitators. I, Gregory Chart, *create*!"

The head drew back inside the globe, and two clenched fists rose before the magnified face, pounding knuckles against knuckles.

Looking at him, Dr Lem thought: *This is the most dangerous man in the galaxy. Artists have always been dangerous. But with this much talent and this much power . . .*

He said suddenly, "But you won't find what you want here. This is an ancient world. There's no chance to create on Yan—only to . . ."

"Imitate?" Chart supplied softly.

"I was hesitating to use the word. But—yes."

There was a pause. Eventually Chart said, not looking towards Lem but into vacant space, "Yes, in one sense that may be true. Nonetheless, don't you see that that would furnish *me* with a new challenge? I've performed for every human-occupied world. What's left to me? I'm not worn out, I'm not old! Oh, in years, I suppose I am, but not up here inside my head! My brain heaves and surges like a wild beast in a cage, conceiving and aborting a score of ideas every day! I can carve a sun's corona into strange and lovely shapes, create poems in plasma, and—yes, I have passed time in doing that. But for whom? Who can watch me? Who can appreciate what I do on that scale? Am I to perform for myself and the dumb churning audience of the stars? Shall I tackle colossal simple tasks, tug the stars into new constellations? I think I could; the last contract I had was with Tubalcain, the payment is still not exhausted, and if I chose I could take the balance in the machines I'd need. What for? To leave myself a monument, a constellation in the sky of some abandoned planet which will spell my name to the first explorers when they get there? I don't want a monument! I'm an artist, Dr Lem! I need an audience, the most discerning, the most discriminating, the most responsive I can find! I've used up all of them . . . bar one."

"An audience of another species," said Dr Lem. The sound of his own words made him shiver.

"Yes." Chart licked his lips. "Yes, I have never satisfied an alien audience. And I think—I have to believe—that I can."

"Papa!" Giuseppe said. "Give me the binox for a moment. The go-board is active again."

Ducci swung around, raising the binox to his own eyes instead, and a moment later roared, "Quick! Go and—No, *diavolo!* Too late, too late!"

He rounded on his son furiously. "You said you'd tied it up for hours—that news-machine!"

Flinching back from his father's sudden unaccountable rage, Giuseppe said, "But I did! I sent it on a wild-goose chase!"

"Then why is it over there at the board, in terminal emergency mode?"

"*What?*" Giuseppe seized the binox and stared through them. True enough. On the edge of the go-board, the obsolescent machine was taking itself systematically to bits: individual sections each primed with the same condensed news-item and a different route across the board.

"Now the whole galaxy will know Chart has come here!" Ducci fumed. "We'll be inundated! Oh, you—you. . . !"

"Oh, shut up, papa!" his son snapped. "Chart had probably told everyone al-

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ready. A man like him must have news-machines at his heels wherever he goes. Maybe that one came here because of him."

"I guess so," Ducci admitted reluctantly after a few moments' reflection. "But all the same it makes me *mad!* Why couldn't the bastard have gone somewhere else?

"Why are you so angry about him coming to Yan?" Giuseppe countered. "Surely it's—"

There was a shout, and they glanced around to find Warden Chevsky approaching them, obviously out for someone's blood.

Behind the deforming globe, Chart shifted on his chair and brought his face and limbs into newly weird arrangements. He said, "Before we go any further, let me dispose of all the other objections I suspect you're going to advance. The question of payment will not arise—as I told you, I have a vast amount of credit on Tubalcain, enough, if I spin it out, to last me the rest of my life."

Dr Lem nodded. He had never been to Tubalcain, but it was notoriously the galaxy's most industrialised palent: almost intolerable to live on because everything right down to water and oxygen had to be manufactured, but so dedicated to technology that its output of desirable goods supported half a dozen other planets' needs. Its products were even exported to Earth.

He made a mental note to check the encyclopedia and find out what the people there had hired Chart to do.

"Also," Chart pursued, "I imagine you've considered getting up a petition, or something, to have me legally removed from Yan. You can't. Earthsiders here are on sufferance. Legally and actually the authority resides with the natives. I'm prepared to take my chances with them. And you can't keep me from meeting and talking to them, can you?"

"No, of course not. You and your staff have the same rights as if you'd come off the go-board in conventional fashion—"

"Staff?" Chart cut in. He curled his lip. "I have no *staff!* I did have, long ago, but one by one they decided they could do better on their own after milking my brains, and they drifted away. And one by one they found out that they couldn't. Some have begged to be taken back, and I've always refused them. I've learned to do without them—without anyone, indeed, except my mistress."

He gestured, and Lem turned automatically to look at the woman on the gallery. She raised the hand which did not carry the merlin as though to unhood it. Instead, after a second of hesitation, she removed her own hood.

"Remember me, Yigael?" she said.

Time stopped.

Since nobody had disturbed him—one couldn't count the interruption caused by the news-machine—and the streets outside were still quiet, Erik Svitra decided to look over the house he'd wandered into and see how these people lived. He had inspected four or five of the house's nine rooms before he suddenly realised that it wasn't the squalid little hovel he had assumed; it was meant for *one* family.

He didn't believe it at first. Back where he came from, a place this size would never have been built, but the larger structures that were built

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averaged three or four rooms per family.

So *that* was why they had single-form furniture! No point in having items that changed their shape and texture, if you had enough space to store separate units for each domestic purpose. Old-fashioned, maybe, but at least it meant you didn't have to squabble over whether you should or shouldn't change the eatoff into a lieon now, or later.

And that thing over there, that he'd taken for a funny arrangement of shelves: that must be a staircase! No ascensor to reach the upper story—but, on the other hand, no exercisers in the children's playroom, either. They must get their exercise on the stairs, lifting their own weight against this Earth-force gravity, and maybe even running and jumping, right out in the open.

Hmm!

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. He'd been wondering why anyone should choose to come to this one enclosed corner of a world full of funny aliens, instead of a human-controlled planet. All of a sudden he was wondering the exact opposite: why the place wasn't cram-jammed with people in search of the quiet life and the good old-type luxuries. Of course, there were probably drawbacks: insects, maybe, or cold weather, or—what was the term?—rain.

Still, there was one thing in the place that was bang up to date: a communet terminal with as wide a range of facilities as he'd seen anywhere. He ran his finger over the board, counting news, encyclopedia, person-call, conference, real-time entertainment, home-help, and library options. Almost absent-mindedly, he chose encyclopedia, and then tapped out the name CHART, GREGORY.

Just to see if the facilities were as good as they looked.

When Dr Lem descended the ship's ramp again, he found that the roses had gone, and the soldiers, and the musicians. There was nothing but the plain grey ramp. Delighted to be back in the open air, Pompy wriggled out of his arms and raced ahead down it to the ground, not even minding when she was pitched off the end because she misjudged the speed of travel and rolled over in the dust. She might almost have been a kit again.

Calling her to heel, he set off the way he had come, and realised with a start that there was no one waiting at the foot of the ramp to demand what he and Chart had talked about. Instead, there was a dense crowd of people with their backs to him, about a hundred metres off. Some sort of trouble, he read from their nervous gestures.

Abruptly Hector Ducci caught sight of him and strode to meet him. Others followed: his son Giuseppe, and those of the people of the enclave that Dr Lem would have termed *responsible*—in other words, those who would at once have realised the danger of Chart coming here, without being even briefly blinded by the man's reputation. He saw Toshi Shigaraku—her husband Jack was still lecturing his pupils—and Pedro Phillips too. All except Harriet Pokorod, the medical doctor.

Giuseppe outstripped the others on his young legs, and called, "Dr Lem! A terrible thing has happened!"

"There are going to be plenty of terrible things happening," Dr Lem said. "So how has the sequence begun?"

"It's Warden Chevsky! He's beaten up his wife! Right out in the open where

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everyone could see—caught her by the hair and just *hit* her!"

"That's right!" his father confirmed, catching up. "Never saw anything so disgusting—like something out of the Dark Ages! Seems he was drunk last night, and slept clear through the show in the sky, everything. Blames her for not waking him up!"

"Harriet's tending Sidonie now," Pedro Phillips supplemented. "But he cut her lip open, blacked her eye . . . Ach!"

"And we'd better get you away from here," Ducci muttered. "He's furious because you were invited on board. Thinks he ought to have been the first to greet Chart— Say! What did you talk about?"

"It's not so much what we talked about," Dr Lem answered. "It's more who he has with him."

"Staff?" Ducci frowned. "You mean a lot of them—?"

"No, there's just his mistress and himself. The brain of that ship is so far in advance of anything else I've seen I can scarcely believe it. He said his last contract was with Tubalcain, so I guess he took it in part-payment." Dr Lem rubbed his eyes. The sun, despite its halo, was very bright out here.

"But it's his mistress's name. Hector, you may not remember her, but I'm sure Pedro does. Morag Feng?"

"She came back?" Phillips said in disbelief, and his jaw hinged open and hung foolish-wide.

IX

Red-eyed from lack of sleep, his belly rumbling with indefinable apprehension, Marc Simon wandered across the rough ground beyond the spaceport, clutching the dictyper which he invariably carried so that he could note down things he saw or promising turns of phrase which occurred to him. Shyalee had insisted that they come out of town, along with everybody else, to look at the giant ship resting on its bed of yellowish crushed rock like the egg of some impossible dinosaur, so he had complied, and they had duly stood around with everybody else watching it do nothing, until she grew bored and tried to persuade him to join the cluster of apes surrounding Rayvor-Harry and Alice Ming. The latter was holding forth with authority about Chart's work, though Marc was sure she had never actually seen any.

So he had left Shyalee to her own devices and set off at random in the direction of the Mutine Mandala. After he had gone some distance, he had heard a blast of music from behind him, and glanced back to see that there was at long last something happening around the ship . . . but he had decided to keep going.

He had also noticed that the go-board was active; that, though, was nothing extraordinary. It was, after all, spring again, and every spring a handful of people wandered across the board to Yan to escape winter on their own planet, or perhaps a winter state of mind which lasted the year around.

That chubby stranger he and Shyalee had encountered rising from the shelter of a bush, for example, with some kind of salve newly dried on his bare brown legs. Marc frowned. He had been so preoccupied he had scarcely noticed the fellow. Freelance drug-tester, hadn't he said? In that case, if he was here after a sample of *sheyashrim*, someone ought to warn him off . . . or

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perhaps not. Perhaps he should be left to find out for himself. Marc didn't much care for the scouts who toured the worlds looking for new ways of hiding reality from people. On the other hand, one must be tolerant; it was a big galaxy, as the saying went, with room for all types.

And he was not the one to criticise, not after what he had nearly done last night at Goydel's.

The path he followed took him along the meeting-line of Blaw and Rhee; one side of him were inhospitable rocks, the other gardens and orchards, both stretching for hundreds of kilometres. Trees here and there stood proud to the sun, and there were numerous brooks, miniature tributaries of the Smor. He came to one and followed it absently, a narrow pebbly stream fringed with plants like blue moss and populated by organisms neither plant nor animal, which spent most of the year as sessile flowers but with the advent of spring drew up their roots and set off, snail-slow, in search of more favourable locations.

In a while he chanced on a smooth rock overlooking the stream and sat down on it, his back firmly to the direction he had come from. For a long time—he had no idea how long—he stared at the sun-glint on the water so fixedly that when he blinked he saw it again with colours reversed inside his lids.

Abruptly he started the dictyper and spoke to it. An uncritical machine was the only audience with which he could share his present doubts.

"How is it that I feel this visit of Chart's to be both inevitable and disastrous?

"Well, I guess it was inevitable that he would ultimately feel the attraction of performing for an alien species. I've never seen him at work, but I've seen the impact his performance on Hyrax had left half a century later, so I have a clear idea of the scale he operates on. I don't know if he's what some people call him—the greatest artist of all time—but there's no disputing one of his achievements. He's carved out a whole new medium of expression, and instead of what usually happens, someone coming up from behind almost at once and improving on the pioneer's experiments, he's kept ahead of everyone else including the competitors who studied under him.

"Which seems to make people working in other fields feel insecure. I know I've been hearing patronising remarks about him all my life. I guess it must be the same kind of thing as you'd have found when the first person cast a statue in bronze and other sculptors realised what was wrong with stone, or when fixed images on tape and—oh, what's the word? Not layer, not skin . . . Got it! Film! I mean when stage-directors found tape and film competing with the disposition of live actors on a set.

"So here he is, a galaxy-wide public figure, who only needs to set course for an inhabited system and the news runs ahead of him and—and provokes debates in the planetary congress! So the temptation to perform for a non-human audience must be a terrific challenge for him.

"But that's not why I think of his arrival on Yan as being *inevitable*. More . . ."

Marc hesitated, wondering whether what he was about to record would sound silly, then ploughed on doggedly.

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"More, his very existence is a Yannish kind of idea. He is, I guess, a dramatist. But he's so much more than just that. He's about as near as we humans have ever come to realising the implications of that term which they introduced, long before I reached here, to translate the epithet given to the—the heroes, the protagonists, the whatever-the-hell, who dominate the Mutine Epics. Like them, Gregory Chart is a dramaturge."

And what does that mean? Having the word is very useful; it's pregnant with associations and I'm obliged to whoever coined it. But—!

He sighed and shut off the machine. Coming back to the real world, after an absence much longer than he had intended, he glanced about him and discovered how short the shadows were.

Why, it must be almost mid-day. And here he was practically on the threshold of the Mutine Mandala!

Thought and action coincided, almost in panic. It had been months, more than a year perhaps, since he had seen the Mutine Flash from this close. And he had meant to experience it a second time from inside the mandala, having worked his way back to it by slow daily degrees, and somehow . . .

He thrust that memory aside, and all the recollected sins of omission which trailed behind it, and considered the hill he had been breasting as he followed the course of the brook upstream. Near its crest stood a substantial ghul-tree, whose nuts formed a staple of the Yannish diet. Its branches were broad and evenly spaced, a natural ladder. He headed for it promptly. Up there, fifteen or twenty metres above the ground, he ought to be able to see clear across the Blaw Plateau to the point where the back of the land broke and began its five-hundred-kilometre slide, imperceptibly gradual, to the shore of the Gheb Salt Lake. There were other towns and cities in that direction, some of them larger than Prell, but none having so handsome a location on so broad a river.

He stretched up to take hold of the first foliage-shaded branch, and something stabbed at his fingers.

He cried out and leapt away, a trickle of blood running over his knuckles. Staring up into the twilight among the branches, he made out something moving, heard rustling sounds.

A bird? But this is Yan! There are no birds!

Then, from behind him, a voice called, "Oh, I'm sorry! Did he hurt you?"

Hurrying up the rise with a swish of boots came a woman in skin-tight green, nearly as tall as himself, hair the shade of beaten copper drawn back from her long face with a clip of jet. On one wrist she wore a leather cuff decorated with diamonds.

Marc stared at her stupidly, not wondering why he hadn't seen her before—if one person had wandered across the go-board to Yan today, so might another have—but why he hadn't seen her *before*. Being that tall, she would have had to lie down and grovel in order to . . .

Oh. On her hip: the golden glint of an anti-see unit—expensive, and on many planets illegal. But not uncommon.

She asked again, with a hint of impatience, "*Are* you hurt?"

"I . . ." He looked at his hand, shook the blood away to expose the injury, and found a mere scratch. "Uh—no, I guess not badly."

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"If it was his beak, not to worry. It's his talons that may cause infection. Though every time he perches on my wrist they're automatically cleaned, of course. Home, you evil creature, home, home! So-o-o! Home, home, home!"

She reached up into the dimness of the tree. With a muttered complaint the bird flapped towards her wrist, and she dexterously hooded him.

"There!" she said, turning back to Marc. "He won't apologise on his own behalf, so I'd better. He always resents the first flighting on a new planet, and thinks it and everything about it is out to persecute him. Very paranoid creatures, these!"

"But beautiful," Marc said, having stripped a leaf from the tree to wrap around his cut finger. Chul-leaves were useful to assist clotting, if you were among the lucky five per cent of humans who were not allergic to them. "What is he?"

"Oh, a Salvadoran merlin. Away back when, someone had the bright idea that hawking would be valuable on underdeveloped planets without roads or tracks, not only for hunting but for herding and guarding stock. So he started tinkering with the genetics of all the hawks he could get hold of. One line escaped and bred in the wild, and this one's ancestors were among them. Owing to which he's inherited an exaggerated sense of his own importance—haven't you, you vicious brute?" She jogged her wrist, and the merlin clacked his beak.

March had continued to stare, more at her than the bird, while she was speaking. There was something vaguely familiar about her, as though he had seen a picture of her long ago, but he couldn't place it. He had had time to form an impression of her as a person now, and for some reason he could not express clearly to himself he found he didn't care for the reaction she provoked in him. Her voice was brittle, the words coming over-quickly, and there had been impatience in her tone when she asked the second time if he was hurt . . . He chided himself. He was over-reacting. He had spent so long here on Yan, first in the already leisurely environment of the enclave, then among the Yanfolk whose life had a stately, predetermined quality, that he was probably out of the habit of dealing with people from tenser backgrounds.

He was on the point of asking where she was from, and whether she had come across the board simply to find a place where she could fly her merlin, when he realised that she was in her turn staring at him.

"I—am—a—cretin," she said deliberately. He started.

"Two kinds of cretin. Three!" She took a pace closer to him. "Damnation, you're wearing a *heyk and welwa*, and it's taken me this long to register the fact!"

"I . . ." Marc put his hand up to the breast of the Yannish cape.

"And unless a tattoo-artist or a skin-grafter has moved in here and given those apes what they most want, got rid of their dark patches—in which case you would *not* be wearing that outfit—you're an Earthsider."

Her eyes were very dark green, Marc saw, with the same piercing quality as those of her merlin.

"In which case there's only one person you can be. You're Marc Simon."

It took a very long time to play the article on Chart. Midway through, Erik,

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so fascinated he forgot about the risk of someone coming in and disturbing him, pulled up a chair and sat down before the screen, almost gaping. No wonder they'd gone to look at the starship!

He had never been much interested in the creative arts. His tastes lay more in the direction of the subjective ones—those which came in a pill, a powder, a gas or an injector. But it looked as though when this character Chart set to work, the mind got blown to shreds right out on the objective level!

And, he thought as the article concluded with a reference to a contract on Tubalcain which specified that if you wanted to view a tape of the performance there you had to pay a separate fee, *that word "blown" reminds me of a point I want to check on. How does one get a Yannish girl and is it worth it?*

After some cogitation, he tapped out the article "Yan," sub-category "Interspecies relations," sub-sub-category "Sex." The informat was capable of selecting the proper title if he'd guessed wrong. But all he got was a blank screen, and it dawned on him that, living right here on Yan as they did, the people of the human enclave probably didn't need to find that sort of information through the communet.

"I—uh . . ." Marc's voice sounded creaky in his own ears. "How did you know?"

"I'm Morag Feng—mistress of Gregory Chart." That name rang a faint chord in memory, like the face, but he still could not identify it. "I've read your translation of the Mutine Epics. I was the one who gave it to Gregory, and that's what brought him here—your book!"

Marc felt dazed. He said, "Chart—uh—Chart liked my work?"

"Liked it!" With a harsh laugh. "It's the only real translation anyone's ever done of a non-human poem! Here, come on back to the ship with me, right away! I'll call Gregory and tell him I've run into you. He'll be delighted. You're the person he most wants to talk to on this planet . . . Is something wrong?"

She checked in the act of lifting a communet extension to her mouth, a miniature one which hung at her waist on the side opposite her anti-see unit.

"I'm—I'm just overwhelmed," Marc said faintly. "Especially since that translation is terrible. I rushed into it when I'd hardly had time to settle down here. Thought I knew everything about Yan and the Yannish language. It wasn't until I moved out of the enclave that I realised how crude, how clumsy, how superficial it all was!" He clenched his fists in frustration.

"Well, it brought Gregory here," Morag said tartly. "And that's something to your credit, isn't it? Come on!"

"Actually, I . . ." Marc glanced over his shoulder. The sun was very close to the zenith now. "I was hoping to wait and see the Mutine Flash at noon. That's—"

"Yes, I know about the Flash," she interrupted. "But you'll have lots more chances to see it. And if all goes well, before long you'll understand what it is, what it's for."

"What?" That took Marc's breath away completely.

"You heard me!" She seized his arm and began to hurry him along beside her, towards the ship. "What do you think Gregory came here to *do?*"

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X

"MORAG FENG?" said Giuseppe in a baffled tone. "I guess I heard the name somewhere, but—"

"Hey! Lem's out! Let me get at him!"

A roar in the unmistakable voice of Chevsky. The little group swung to face the direction it had come from, and they saw the warden forcing his way between the close-packed ranks of those who had reverted to an ancient habit-pattern and gathered around Sidonie while Harriet Pokorod was ministering to her wounds.

Chevsky's expression was halfway between sheepishness and arrogance, and he was doing his best to make the latter come out on top. Directly on his heels six or eight other people followed.

As the community's psychologist, Dr Lem was strict in not permitting himself likes and dislikes; if he had been able to indulge such luxuries, though, these were the ones he would have detested. Just as Chevsky craved the trappings of authority so much that he had come to what he regarded as a backwater purely because he could hold down a job with a title that he would never have been considered for elsewhere, so these compensated for the smallness of their puddle by trying to be big frogs. In particular, he noticed Dellian Smith and his wife, who were so ashamed of their jobs as sewage and purification experts—no matter how indispensable, how valuable, their speciality—that they had become intimate cronies of Chevsky and would barely associate with the rest of the enclave.

Oh, why do human beings have to be so touchy and pompous?

With heavy menacing strides Chevsky closed the gap and confronted Dr Lem. Pompy, sensing that he intended her master harm, rose up on all her many feet, hoisted her fur into the extreme defensive mode which made it as stiff and prickly as a porcupine's quills, and opened her mouth to display her fangs. But she was old, and the fangs were blunt and unimpressive.

"Warden!" A cry from behind Chevsky, and here, following him and his companions, came Harriet Pokorod, trying to re-pack her medical bag as she hastened along.

Chevsky ignored her. He planted his hands on his hips and rasped, "Well, at least you're not trying to dodge me—not that you could! I know you like to take our heads apart behind the scenes, work out our weak points, tinker with us until we can't call our brains our own, but this time you've gone too far!"

There was a dead pause. Then: "What in the galaxy are you talking about?" demanded Hector Ducci.

Chevsky favoured him with a withering glare. "You know damned well what I mean—Sidonie and your wife are thick as thieves! You know Sid's been going behind my back to talk to this shrivelled bag of bones, gabbing about things that ought to be personal between husband and wife! So don't try and convince *me* it wasn't due to him that she left me asleep when everyone else knew Chart had arrived! Don't tell me it was an accident that the warden was the last to know we had such a distinguished visitor, and this scarecrow Lem was the first to be invited aboard his ship!"

"And don't try getting back at the warden here for what he did to Sidonie, either!" Dellian Smith interjected. "If

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I'd been in his shoes I'd have done the same."

"Quite right too!" his wife said with asperity.

A period of hostile silence. During it, quite distinctly, Dr Lem heard Toshi's teeth chattering.

At length he said, having honed the words, "Well, it wouldn't have made too good an impression if the first man Chart met here was staggering drunk."

The time for delicacy was over. There had to be axes as well as scalpels.

Chevsky turned purple. Before he could speak, though, Dr Lem hurried on. "No one who wasn't intoxicated could have slept through what happened last night! Pedro?"

"Right," the merchant said, taking his stand at Dr Lem's side. "He bought six litres of assorted liquors from me last time he called by."

"And he's my biggest client for the kind of minor analgesics and stomach-pills you need to take care of the morning after," Harriet said, having finally replaced everything in her medical kit and come around to take the corresponding place on Dr Lem's other side. In her haste, she almost trod on Pompy, and had to apologise and pet her—an impulse she regretted, because the chubble was still in defensive mode and her fur was sharp.

"Doesn't a man with a wife like Sid have the right to drown his sorrows now and then?" Dellian Smith countered. But his heart wasn't in it; the words rang false. In any case Chevsky had decided not to let himself be baited.

"Shut up!" he said, jabbing Smith in the ribs. "I didn't come here to talk about that. Even if Sid does gossip about it to this bastard Lem, I think my private life is my affair! I'm not proud of the way that woman acts, but it's up to me to take care of it as I see fit. Marital discord isn't grounds to impeach me, you know that, and if I drink now and then, so what? Doesn't interfere with my duties!"

He glared at the trio facing him: the psychologist, the merchant and the medical doctor. At their backs Ducci was hovering, uncertain whether he should declare his sympathies or whether, as technical supervisor of the enclave, he was better advised to remain neutral. Dr Lem hoped fervently he would choose the latter course.

"No, what's really important right now," Chevsky continued, "is something else. It's this impression everyone has that there's a self-appointed caucus which wants to prevent Chart from performing here."

Vigorous nods from the Smiths and those beside them. It wasn't hard to deduce who "everyone" must be.

Chevsky set his shoulders back and jutted his jaw aggressively. "Now I admit right away I never saw Chart working! But I been talking with a lot of people who did—your wife among them, Ducci!" With a scowl. "I don't have to be a genius to realise his work is epoch-making. Having Chart perform on your planet is—well, it's kind of a landmark. A historical event! And I can judge the feeling in the enclave when it comes to something big, something important. So I'm here to tell you straight out: if you try and obstruct Chart, prevent him from performing here, you're going to find every last mother's son on the other side from you—you self-important prigs!"

The Smiths nodded again, and so did his other companions. They put on expressions which apparently were at-

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tempts to duplicate Chevsky's, and waited for a response.

"But he doesn't have the least intention of performing for us," Dr Lem said after the lapse of a few seconds.

"What?" Chevsky took half a pace forward.

"What makes you think he'd regard three hundred people as worth his trouble? Would you expect him to, when he performs for continents, for whole planets?"

"You mean—" Chevsky began, but Smith shouldered past him.

"You mean the bastard wants to mount a show for the apes?" His tone was wringing wet with disgust and horror.

As though intended to answer precisely that question, once again Chart's voice rang out from the ship.

"It has been perceived that three most distinguished members of the Yannish community of Prell are present, Speaker Kaydad, *Hrath* Vetcho and *Hrath* Goydel!"

"Does he even speak Yannish?" Harriet muttered under her breath.

"You'd expect him to bone up on everything about this planet before coming here, wouldn't you?" Phillips answered equally softly.

"Should it be the desire of these gentlemen to enter the ship, it will delight Gregory Chart to entertain them on board!"

"Hey!" Ducci started. "What about showing advanced technology to non-humans. . .?" His voice trailed away. He knew, as well as anyone else in earshot, that raising a trivial charge like that against Chart was a waste of time. This man had been writing his own laws for well over half a century.

He lifted his binox and peered through them. After a moment he said, "Yes, there they go."

Chevsky, the Smiths and their companions, exchanged looks of amazement and dismay.

"Well, we'll see about *that*!" the warden exclaimed at length, and stormed away.

"But it isn't really Chart we have to worry about," Dr Lem said at last.

"What?" Harriet glanced from one to another of their uniformly depressed faces.

"Morag Feng's on board," Phillips said. "She's Chart's mistress now."

"Oh, *no*!" Harriet's square, sensible face paled, and she let her medical kit fall to the full stretch of her arm.

"What the hell is all this about Morag Feng?" Ducci demanded. "I have this vague idea I heard the name, but. . ."

"It would have been just before your time," Dr Lem said wearily, passing his hand through his shock of hair. "I'd been here for—let me see—yes, about fourteen years, so that would make it eighteen years ago. But you knew her, Pedro, didn't you?"

The merchant gave an emphatic nod. "She wandered across the board to Yan the summer after I brought the family here. I remember her very well."

"And about two months before Alice came," Harriet supplied in a tight voice.

"My—no!" Ducci clenched his fists. "She's never the woman Alice stole Rayvor from?"

"She is indeed," Dr Lem said sadly. "And she hasn't grown out of her hatred, either. I'm sure of that."

Fool! Idiot! Cretin! Self-directed insults marked time with Erik's footsteps

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as he plodded back the way he had come into the town, stooped under the weight of his pack. Of course he ought to have recognised the name Chart—instantly! He ought to have taken personal credit for identifying him to the news-machine, and then he could have lodged a fee-claim at the local informat, and, assuming Chart was really as newsworthy as the encyclopedia had indicated, he'd have had credit in store to get him off Yan if he drew a blank as far as drugs were concerned.

Imbecile!

He stopped dead in his tracks. While he was using the communet in that house where he'd taken the food, why had he not dialled the article on the drug he was investigating? It would have saved him an immense amount of trouble. There was a limit to the amount of off-planet information one could store in an encyclopedia; there were strict conditions regulating the priority accorded to types of data, as a result, so back where Erik had come from on Ilium, there had been one reference to the *sheyashrim* drug, and that merely in passing, during a description of one of these sadistic orgies, or whatever, in which so many of the Yanfolk apparently got killed. There were plenty of planets where sadistic orgies were in vogue, and most of them were more than averagely wealthy. Hence his visit.

And obviously, right here on Yan, there ought to be a higher priority assigned to local information that—

He was on the point of turning around and heading straight back for the nearest empty human house, to consult the communet again. Up ahead, though, he suddenly realised there were loud voices—human—raised in excited conversation. He blinked. Five or six people were approaching, and at their head, the same warden he'd woken up without planning to.

"Hey!" the warden shouted, spotting him. "Hey, look there! That's the guy who did me the good turn, woke me and told me Chart was here when Sid had sneaked off and left me! Say, feller!"

Beaming, he advanced with an air of forced joviality. Erik sighed, let his pack slide to the ground, and offered his hand.

"Morag Feng," Ducci said, twisting his mouth around the name as though it were bitter. "I did hear about her . . . but it was a long time ago." And he added to Giuseppe, "You were just a baby, then!"

"But I heard the name too," his son countered. "I get this idea she caused a considerable ruction, right?"

"I remember all the details," Dr Lem said quietly. "In a way, possibly some of what happened was my fault. Shall I tell you what I recall?"

"Please!" Ducci said. The others agreed, and Harriet appended a comment of her own.

"It's not the sort of data you can consult the communet for, is it?"

"I guess not," Dr Lem admitted, giving a skeletal smile at the black humour of the remark. "Well. . . Well, basically it happened this way. The enclave was relatively new, then—I myself came in with the second wave after it was set up, as you know, and it was still making occasional news: the first-ever human settlement on a planet dominated by another species. And, of course, our sexual compatibility was bringing in all kinds of disturbed persons, who caused

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terrible trouble. Didn't they, Harriet?"

The medical doctor snorted loudly.

"This Morag Feng was not a kink, really, but not very stable, either. She had theories about the dramaturges, the ancient Yannish civilisation, and the rest of it, and she was determined to prove herself right. She arrived, she declined to live among the people of the enclave, and she took a Yannish lover. Rayvor. In fact it was from her he learned the name Harry which he uses now.

"And then Alice Ming turned up—who did want to live in the enclave, who also wanted a Yannish lover, but preferred him to be. . ." Dr Lem hesitated. "Subservient? I think that's about right.

"Morag—I know this, because I was her confidant, and I guess I was more than a little in love with her myself . . . Morag wanted to find out, right away, what if anything the truth was behind the Mutine Epics, the wats and mandalas and so forth. So she went off and lay on the floor of the Mutine Mandala during the Flash."

A moment's silence. Ducci said at length, "The way Marc Simon did, the other year?"

"Yes. And you know what it did to him—drove him crazy for about three weeks, didn't it? He said it was like compressing a lifetime of psychedelic experience into thirty seconds."

"And he got terrible sunburn," Harriet muttered.

"But Morag's tall, muscular," Dr Lem said. "Alice is thin and delicate. More to Yannish taste. Alice saw her chance, and took Rayvor away while Morag was wandering around the Plateeau of Blaw, gibbering to herself and screaming if anybody came near. When she recovered, she came and stayed with me for a while, needing a shoulder to weep on, and I persuaded her to go back across the board to some other world. And she did. And now she's back. And she's brought Gregory Chart with her. I repeat that, I emphasise that: *this is the woman who has brought Gregory Chart to Yan!*"

XI

"GREGORY'S ENGAGED with a delegation of Yanfolk," Morag whispered as she and Marc drew closer to the ship. "I'll take you aboard anyway."

She had turned her anti-see unit back on and put her arm around his waist to ensure that its field would envelop them both.

With half of his mind, Marc wanted to run like hell. With the other, and dominant, half, he wanted to meet Chart. He wanted—*needed*—to hear someone famous for his artistic brilliance compliment him on the work he had done on Yan. The natives didn't go in for fulsome compliments; at most, they sighed, or smiled, or arranged that the next time an especially successful poet/artist/musician/talker appeared at a soirée, the audience was slightly larger.

It was slim rations for a human being.

But on the way back to where the ship rested, he had begun to hear the faint bells of memory rung by his companion's name echo louder and louder, and—just about at the point where the ship was clearly visible—he had identified the mental reference. Harriet Pokorod was talking as she dressed the sunburn, untended for almost three weeks, on his arms and legs and face.

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And she was saying that the last time she had a similar case. . .

Yes, he had recalled correctly. Morag Feng was the name of the woman who had come to Yan more than ten years before his own arrival, perhaps twelve years earlier, and lived among the Yanfolk and tried to experience the impact of the Mutine Flash.

His own head reeled when he merely thought of the single time he himself had undergone that terrifying ordeal. When the sun was at a certain angle relative to the mandala's crystal shafts, something happened. A resonance was set up, so to speak. From a distance, what one saw was a play of light and colour, dazzling but enjoyable. From within the structure itself. . .

Indescribable. But so devastating, his subconscious had undermined his long-standing plan to accustom himself to it slowly, returning day after day and each time witnessing the Flash from a closer spot until he was able to re-enter the mandala and comprehend what the sunlight was doing. Until today he had nearly forgotten he had ever so intended.

A hundred times, as he walked at her side, he formed the question on his lips: "Are you the Morag Feng who. . .?"

And a hundred times, he abandoned it, afraid.

As when Marc had wandered off, most of the sightseers were congregated around the far side of the ship. She led him straight up to its hull, and through it. He winced as he entered. He had been so long here on Yan, he had almost forgotten about interpenetration doors. There was a corridor beyond, plain and white like the hull, elegantly proportioned but featureless.

"Gregory!" Morag said to the air.

The air answered. "Mr Chart is engaged with the Yanfolk still. However, it is projected that he will only be in conference for another four to six minutes. Phrases associated with leave-taking have been detected in the conversation."

"Fine. Then take us up to the main gallery, will you?"

The corridor instantly became an ascensor, and Marc felt the disturbing tug of a transversal gravity field. He was impressed. The equipment of this vessel was fantastic.

"Was that the—uh—the ship you were talking to?" he ventured after a moment.

"Hm? Oh, yes. Of course. Gregory had it specially built on Tubalcain."

Another few seconds, and they emerged on to a silver-railed gallery overlooking the huge central volume of the ship—although that was a mere fraction of its total bulk, the rest doubtless being taken up with the drive, the life-support systems, and the machinery required by Chart's profession. On the floor below, beyond a swirling one-way sound and vision screen, Marc saw a perfect simulation of a Yannish mansion-hall, in which a human—logically, Chart—sat talking with. . .

Marc blinked in amazement. He had fully intended to gaze fixedly at Chart, taking the greatest possible advantage of his first sight of this galaxy-famous artist who made him feel small, terribly young, and more than somewhat frightened.

But Chart wasn't just talking to "a Yannish delegation."

He was talking to *the* Yannish delegation. He was talking to Speaker Kaydad, and to Vetcho, and to Goydel.

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Marc would have recognised them anywhere.

Morag did something he didn't see, and voices came to his ears: Chart, and Kaydad, exchanging compliments as the visitors rose. It was a long moment before he realised that the words were in Yannish.

"Does Chart *speak* Yannish?" he demanded.

"What? Oh, of course not!" Morag answered impatiently. "The ship translates for him." She relented slightly, and turned her burning gaze directly on him.

"Much of the vocabulary bank was primed from your translations," she said. "You should be proud."

Then, about three or four minutes later, she said, "Okay, they're on their way. Take us down."

With a stomach-churning lurch—which was actually perfectly smooth, only Marc was not prepared for it—the entire gallery descended to the main floor. The vision of the Yannish mansion dissolved at the same time, as Chart was escorting his visitors to the door, and by the time he turned back and noticed that Marc and Morag were present, it had turned into a pleasant glade carpeted with highly convincing grass and ringed with trees.

"You must be Marc Simon."

An—*ordinary* voice. Not quite the echoing, god-like thunder he had been half-imagining. He found himself offering his hand in return for Chart's, found himself establishing that the great man's grip was bony and rather weak, that his smile was skeletal and his whole body was thin to the point of being scrawny.

But a fire blazed behind his eyes. The second Marc met his gaze, he knew why this man was great.

A caress on Morag's bare forearm, and then: "Sit down! Some refreshment! Morag no doubt told you, this is a great pleasure for me, that I've long been looking forward to!"

Chairs sprang from nowhere, rustic in style to match the glade, and a table with a jug of chilled wine and several mugs.

"Hah! Good to be back in a chair—those Yannish cushions must take getting used to." Chart dropped his bony frame into one and gestured; the wine poured itself, and a full mug soared to within easy reach of Marc's hand. Morag chose a seat a little to one side, as though preferring to be audience at this encounter. A faint smile played around her lips.

"Your health," Chart said, seizing a mug which had risen before him in similar manner. "To the man with the greatest grasp of Yannish culture!" He drank, set the mug down, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "What *is* shrimashey, by the way?"

It was all going too quickly for Marc to follow, accustomed as he had been for years to the leisurely pace of Yannish society. Morag put her hand on Chart's shoulder.

"You're rushing him!" she exclaimed, and added to Marc, "You'll have to forgive him—he says he's always like this when a project really grabs hold of his imagination."

"True, true!" Chart gave a chuckle. "Yes, I'm sorry—I must appear a bit overwhelming in this state. Never mind! Can you tell me? It's what I most need to know."

"Well, it's—uh—it's primarily a population-balancing mechanism," Marc

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said after a pause. "But you must have heard about that."

"Oh, of course! I have kilometres, lightyears, parsecs of tape about it!" Chart gestured, and part of the surrounding glade faded away in favour of a display of *shrimashey* in progress in the open air, a satellite view of one of the rare public outbreaks which occurred perhaps once in ten or fifteen years and involved half the population of a town. Marc had seen this particular recording before, and it made his spine crawl now as it had done the first time: the sight of those masses of adult, mature Yanfolk piling into a writhing heaving confusion of bodies.

There had been eight deaths on that occasion.

"Everyone can find out that after a birth," Chart said, "the adult Yanfolk meet in groups and drink this—this drug which turns off their higher rational faculties, turning over their physical responses to the lower ganglion in the spine. That's the same one which is involved in sexual contact, right?"

Sexual contact . . .

Abruptly the entire story of Morag Feng sprang into Marc's memory. He had heard it once, barely paid attention. . . but now it came back with a crash. He said faintly, "Ah—yes!"

And wondered whether news of her return had yet reached Alice Ming.

"You'll forgive me, I hope," Chart murmured, "but in view of the—ah—the fact that you live with a Yannish girl I'd like to ask about this compatibility we have."

Hot words boiled to Marc's lips, but Morag forestalled what he would have said. She leaned forward and smiled.

"Gregory has heard all about it from a woman's point of view, Marc. He'd like to ask a man, as well."

Defeated, Marc leaned back in his chair, offered his mug to the jug for a refill and received it automatically, and said, "Well, you probably know that there's this organ, the *caverna veneris*, and when it's put in contact with the male proboscis it begins to—throb, and massages these little flakes of skin off it. Which is what fertilises the female, only it's highly inefficient because the incidence of pregnancy averages twice a lifetime for a Yannish female, and they're sexually active from about age twenty-four to age one hundred thirty-five. It's not the same as it is with us, in that there's not the same element of tension in it, and there's no actual orgasm, no climax, but it's tremendously—uh—pleasurable for them, and so they like to do a lot of it. And there's this strong emotional commitment involved. Not like making love together among humans. More like—uh—agreeing to make a trip to another planet together. Something like that. A—commitment." He gulped more wine.

"And the male has this same—what did you call it?—this same throbbing reflex," Chart pursued. "I see. And this is controlled by the corresponding lower spinal ganglion, the same which is activated during *shrimashey*, and. . . . And it's gratifying to a human?"

There was something repulsive in Chart's tone, as though he were a voyeur, perverted. His voice sounded dirty. Marc was on the verge of a heated retort—though he could never have explained in a single sentence just what it was he felt having Shyalee as a mistress, all the overtones of flattery, of determination to bridge interstellar gulfs as perhaps in the long-ago Dark Ages a few brave individuals had tried

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to bridge the gap between races and language-groups—when Morag said sharply, "Yes!"

And he had to admit the same was true for a man, and meekly echoed her.

"But no climax," Chart mused. "Does that mean there's some truth in the notion that *shrimashey* itself is a sort of orgasm—an instant discharge of neurotic and antisocial tendencies?"

Marc recovered abruptly from the distaste Chart's previous remark had evoked in him, and felt a stab of respect. If he was aware of that notion, he must have dug very deep indeed into the corpus of data human investigators had accumulated about the Yanfolk.

"There is a theory to that effect," Marc said after a pause to sip his wine. "I'm inclined to it myself. One knows that human orgasm does discharge tension. One would expect a similar need in the Yanfolk. What one finds is. . ." He spread his hands.

"Catharsis instead," Chart proposed.

"Well put! Yes, 'catharsis' is the nearest any human language has come to a concept relating to *shrimashey*."

"And it works," Chart murmured.

"Something works," parried Marc. "At any rate, their—"

"Their society has been stable for millennia," Chart cut in. "I heard about that. But what interests me most of all is— Did you know a census had been conducted on Yan regularly for the past century?"

"What?" Marc stared at him. "But the Yanfolk. . ."

Oh. Not by them. By us.

"I see you caught on quickly," Chart smiled. "Yes, we have carried out a regular census ever since first contact. Did you know there are *always* one point eight times ten to the seventh Yanfolk, and there has never, in the past century, been a deviation from this figure amounting to more than *five*?"

Marc re-heard the words in recent memory. . . and jolted so violently he spilled his wine over his hand. He said hoarsely, "It can't be that exact!"

"The census?" Chart said.

"No, the. . . The population-control mechanism." Marc felt his eyes forced out to staring roundness.

"Apparently it is," That was Morag. "When I left here—you knew I'd been here before? Yes, I can read in your face that you did—when I left here, I determined to find out everything that was known about Yan, down to the things which Earthsider bureaucrats are so scared by that they're keeping them secret. I lost count of the men I had to seduce before I got what I wanted—though the experience stood me in good stead, you might say, because of Gregory."

Chart shared a wolfish grin with her, which paradoxically made him look older, not younger.

"Maybe it's because of the way I've always worked," he said now, "in that I've always exploited the latest technical advances—like this ship, which they built for me on Tubalcain to replace my former vessel—for artistic ends. But I seem, with guidance from Morag, to have detected a number of otherwise unnoticed patterns in Yannish culture. The precision with which *shrimashey* controls the population is known, of course, to the Earthsiders who thought of making census counts. They've done nothing with the data, though, except record them. I'm fascinated with a sexual reflex which incorporates a population-control technique of such precision. I'm fascinated

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by the existence of a drug which facilitates this *shrimashey*. This is the legacy, for me, of the so-called dramaturges. The Mutine Flash, the Mullom Wat, the Gladen Menhirs—they're static objects, aren't they? But this is a process, built in to the adult members of a numerous species, operating over millennia! And another thing! The Mutine Epics which you have so admirably translated!"

"What about them?" Marc forced out.

"How many books of them are there?"

"Why—why, eleven!"

"I think there are twelve," Chart said with deliberation. "I think I've spotted something you—with respect—overlooked. They are not just poems, they are a *technical manual*, and all that is missing is the key."

XII

Marc said eventually, "I don't think I quite understand."

"Alchemy," Chart said. "Are you familiar with the magical and alchemical manuals they wrote on Earth some fifteen hundred years ago?"

The implication behind the words, of course, was: *I am*. With genuine humility, Marc admitted that he was not.

"I had to look into them last time I was hired by the continent of Europe." Chart drained his mug and let the jug refill it. His manner was lazy, casual, off-hand, that of a man with supreme and unchallengeable competence. "They were composed in a sort of association-code, using agreed conventional images—dragons, astrological figures, various oblique references of that kind. Provided one had been trained in the jargon, one could read them with relative ease. Outsiders, however, found only obscure and baffling nonsense. As a matter of fact, I'm astonished that you yourself aren't grounded in that area. Nothing I've run across, apart from those alchemical manuals, remotely resembles your rendering of the Mutine Epics."

"But the version you have," Marc hastened to point out, "is terrible! I was so proud of it a few years ago—and now I realise just what its shortcomings are."

"Can you rectify them?" Chart demanded.

"I. . ." Marc licked his lips. "Some of them," he said at length.

"Good. As you've no doubt gathered, this ship is equipped with one of the most superb computers ever designed, a late model from Tubalcain with approximately sixteen megabrains' capacity. Three or four times what you need to run a go-board, for example. Currently I have the two versions of the Mutine Epics—the translation you made, and the facsimile of the original which you deposited with the university that published it—running as a subprogramme, for reconciliation and comparison with all the alchemical manuals I've been able to locate. So far there's a high degree of concordance in that subtlest of attributes, style. I put it to you that the dramaturges of Yan, the so-called 'great scientists' of this planet, were nothing of the kind, but aesthetically biased. In a word, they were artists."

"Strangely enough," Marc said after a moment, "I'd been thinking just before Morag found me that you were the

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nearest human being I'd ever heard of to the Yannish dramaturges."

"Interesting!" Chart raised his eyebrows. "Because it's a parallel which had not escaped me." He spoke without false modesty. "Even though the filter of this translation which you now deprecate, I sensed a certain *rapport.*"

"But this—this notion of the Epics as a technical manual," Marc said, reverting to the point which had sunk deep into his mind and begun to fester there, "is. . . Well, an interesting hypothesis, of course. What evidence have you for it, though?"

"I think I'll ask the ship for an opinion," Chart said with a shrug. "It's been analysing the content of the conversation I just had with Kaydad, Goydel and Vetcho." He checked. "Before I consult it, one more point. Am I correct in thinking that the Yanfolk would have selected their most—most conservative individuals to deal with us Earthsiders? I hinted as much to the computer."

"Oh, definitely," Marc declared. "There's an image which I've heard used, which perhaps ordinary people living in the enclave might not have run across. They talk as though the structure of their society were a tower, like the Mullom Wat, which has just that degree of flexibility needed to endure storms without resisting them. And the peak of the tower, the bit which sways furthest of all, is the bit which has to be of the finest workmanship."

"I see." Chart rubbed his chin. "The Mullom Wat, if I recall aright, is *the* one-of the ancient artifacts which we would be hard put to it to duplicate?"

"Oh yes!" Marc was beginning to be caught up in the discussion now; he leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. "That's even more amazing than the Mutine Mandala: a single ovoidal column in the middle of the Ocean of Scand, one piece a hundred and thirty metres long, sunk through twenty metres of water into fifteen metres of bedrock and ooze. You've probably heard that the engineers attached to the first expedition, the discoverers of Yan, tried to think of a way of imitating it, and short of firing it vertically downwards there isn't one. Besides, there's no sign of violence around the foundation and the material it's made from, a ceramic like porcelain, couldn't have stood the shock anyhow."

"I've heard about that, yes," Chart nodded. "But it doesn't do anything, does it? I mean, not in the sense that the Mutine Mandala does."

"Well, in high winds it does sing, like any open-ended pipe," Marc said. "But that's all." He hesitated, glancing at Morag. "By the way, I have to admit that I didn't place Morag's name when we met—not immediately."

She gave him a smile which didn't involve her eyes.

"I remember now, though. Weren't you the first person to experience the Mutine Flash from inside the Mandala?"

Her hand closed on her wine-mug so tightly that the knuckles showed paper-white. "I was," she said thickly after a tense pause. "Am I not still the only one?"

"I tried it," Marc said.

"Did you now? And—?"

"I went insane," Marc muttered, looking down into his own mug. "Afterwards, I promised myself I'd gradually work my way back to it. And I never have. I don't even make a point of seeing it every day."

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"This Flash," Chart said. "Morag has told me about it, obviously. I gather it's unique—I mean, as a manifestation of function—among the ancient relics. What do you think it is?"

"I know only what the Epics say it is," Marc countered.

"Yes," Chart sighed. "They say it's the total information concerning their skills which the dramaturges enshrined in pillars of crystal, a sort of recording which the sun would daily replay until the end of the world. You believe that?"

"I think I do," Marc said. "Only I'm not sure that any human could ever understand the mode of communication employed. I suspect you'd need to have the Yannish lower ganglion, the one which is turned loose by the *sheyashrim* drug, to absorb those data."

"But the Yanfolk don't pay attention to their relics!" Morag broke in. "Do they?"

"True," Marc conceded. "Oh, you see children going to look them over now and then, but adults generally don't make a point of bothering. Even if they're on a journey to a far-distant city, which they've never made before, and it's taking weeks, they won't trouble to make a five-kilometre detour and visit a relic on the way."

"Do you really think it's the lack of a lower ganglion of Yannish type which prevents a human from absorbing the Mutine message?" Chart said. "Or do you think it's because the dust from the Ring garbles the solar spectrum?"

Marc stared at him for long moments. He said at last, "I—I wish I'd thought of that! It makes sense! Can it be tested?"

"Of course it can. I'm already testing it. Or, to be exact, I shall be with effect from tomorrow noon. If the Yanfolk never bother to go near their relics, they presumably won't mind my parking a remote sensor inside the Mandala, feeding back to my computer here. What it will do is simple: it'll record the Flash, for days on end, looking for the high peaks, the signal hidden in the noise, and then filter the noise out. Eventually, with luck, I shall be able to duplicate the Mandala here inside the ship, and use a simulated solar spectrum to—ah—'replay' the message."

"Fantastic!" Marc exclaimed.

"You approve?"

"Do I approve?" Marc was almost jigging up and down with excitement. "Why, it'd be wonderful. . ." His voice trailed away abruptly. "Is *that* what you meant when you said there was a twelfth book of the Mutine Epics?"

Chart gave a skeletal grin. "Well, of course. The Mandala itself, under everybody's noses for countless generations."

"The initiates' vocabulary," Morag said. "The key."

"Did you put him on to this idea?" Marc demanded of her. He was prepared, on the basis of this astonishing insight, to forget everything bad he had ever been told about her. At second-hand, he had never formed a really clear impression of the reasons why she had been so cordially disliked in the enclave during her former visit to Yan, and since he personally had no special fondness for the enclave and its people he was all the more ready to discount what he had heard.

"I think I helped Gregory towards his conclusion," Morag said. "But mainly it's due to his background, his unique pattern of mentation. Do you know much about Gregory's work?"

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Marc hesitated. "Not much. I mean, apart from Hyrax."

"That again!" Chart spoke with a tinge of disgust. "As though liberating a bunch of serfs were my sole justification for existing! I find it debasing—almost humiliating! Your Dr Lem, for example, only a short while ago, threw my work on Hyrax in my face, and I told him what I think of it, and I'm sure he didn't pay the least attention. Now listen, young man! You're a poet! If you can't understand my philosophy and my methods, then no one can!"

He hunched forward, while Marc prepared himself to listen with maximal attention. He could scarcely believe that he was really here, in Gregory Chart's ship, lectured by the great man himself about his art.

And all of a sudden Chart had come alive. The fire behind his eyes spread, as though a gale had picked up a tiny flame and infected a whole forest. His voice crackled with it.

"You will grant, I trust, that the greatest creative force ever to work among intelligent beings—of any species—is the one which makes a culture? *That* is the force before which we all have to bow: poets, musicians, dramatists, philosophers... The process which evolves, patiently, with endless refinement, the totality into which all else is absorbed: *that* is the masterpiece of masterpieces! And it's nothing to do with individuals, except insofar as the time may be ripe for a particular person with a particular gift to leave his imprint on the ephemeral, malleable, fluid constituents of the culture.

"Where are the indices of a culture? In its museums? Never! They are in the nursery-rhymes the children are babbling, the culture-heroes they are taught to emulate, the slang phrases, the jokes which abstract the attitudes of the society into a quintessential distillate like—like the contents of a medical syringe!"

Marc spared a second to look at Morag. She was sitting statue-still, yet poised as though she would nod at any moment, expressing her vigorous agreement.

"And they're in the ideals the members of that culture set for themselves, in the habits people have, in the tastes they show, in the preferences no matter how petty which they display.

"Now, since the advent of the go-board, we are at liberty to roam from one to another of—how many is it? Almost a hundred planets! Ninety-one, I think, last time I checked." Chart gave a harsh laugh. "Culture? On a world where the first arrivals did no more than break ground, build a few huts and general public services, and wandered on because they hated the settlers, the people looking for a permanent home, who followed them from a dozen separate worlds and kept treading on their toes? That's what I take care of. *I make cultures.* Or, at least, I remake them. I dramatise them. I make them vivid, comprehensible, direct to their inhabitants. Sometimes I've worked with ancient traditions, on Earth. They hired me twice in North America, and three times in Europe, and once each in Asia, Africa, Australia. Then they wanted me for South America, and I decided not to accept. I moved on—to Cinula, Hyrax, Groseille, Logres, Pe t'Shwe! And in each place I analysed, studied, deduced, selected, taking those jokes, those nursery-rhymes, those garbled folk-memories, those tales and ballads and epigrams and—and *symbols* which

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form the shared experience of tens of millions of people. Is there a human culture in this galaxy? If there is, then *I built it.*"

Marc's throat was dry and his palms were prickly with sweat. He could not have challenged that proud assertion if his life had hung on doing so.

"You see? I am now one hundred and forty-five years old. I have performed at least once for every human world. The last, and greatest, of my human challenges came on Tubalcain, where they paid me—in part—by building this ship. To make a human culture on a world which is so completely ruled by machines that there is literally nothing except a child which is manufactured without intervention of those machines, not even air, not even drinking-water, not even food. . . And I did it. Not with this ship, either. With my old one, which I had used for half a century. And with my own brain."

He put his palms on his temples, fingers outstretched so that they looked like horns rising from his skull.

"What—what did they receive on Tubalcain?" Marc whispered.

"The sense of belonging to a human society," Chart said. "What else? I did what I always do—I dramatised. Have you woken in the morning to. . .? Oh! I don't know who your heroes are! But to a hero, who greeted you and enlisted you in the venture which made him that hero! To the company of conquerors who gave your planet to you, who welcomed you as one of their number and let you contribute to their great famous victory! Once, in Asia, I gave that sense of participation, in a single month, to a hundred and eighty-eight million people! But then, of course"—his voice fell to a conversational level—"Earth is so unbelievably rich."

Morag smiled and leaned back in her chair, as though she had been worried about Chart's ability to summarise his work adequately, but was now well satisfied with his explanation.

"Ten thousand years from now," Chart said, "they will recognise me as the binding force in human space colonisation. It would have been a good point at which to stop. Unfortunately I am still healthy and active and have no desire to stop. Had it not been for falling in with Morag, I might have lapsed into suicidal despair. But she did seek me out and suggest to me. . . Yan."

He folded his hands comfortably on his lap. "They tell me that without being human the Yanfolk are amazingly close to us Earthsiders. Splendid. They have a culture which is rocking under the gentle, barely noticeable impact of the little human enclave here. Do they require it to be bolstered, re-dramatised for its members after so many millennia during which their nourishment has been no more than folklore, ancient legends, thin and watery fare? Well, do they? I was about to ask the ship, a short time ago, precisely that question. It must by now have completed the analysis of the conversation it recorded during the visit by the Yannish delegation."

Marc tensed. From the air, the same voice he had heard when Morag brought him on board said, "Analysis confirms the tentative prediction. Aware that their culture is vulnerable to the superior material achievements of mankind, the *hrath* in-group of the Yanfolk have been desperately hunting for means to re-actualise the great days of the past and thereby counter the

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so-called 'aping' of human behaviour by the younger generation. Having totally failed despite their best efforts, they are now prepared to adopt any means which comes to hand. Their fullest assistance will be forthcoming."

"Might I also hope," Chart said when that had sunk in, "for the assistance of the greatest living translator of Yannish poetry? I think I shall need it; machines—as I learned the hard way on Tubalcain—leave a great deal to be desired."

Marc sat rigid for long moments, his brain whirling. On the one hand, the risk of deranging Yannish society, so stable for so long, by applying human bias to its cherished ancient dreams; on the other, the tempting prospect of being associated with the first ever of Chart's performances to be built around an alien tradition.

And if Chart is right, and he really knows how to recover the key which will turn the Mutine Epics into a technical manual . . .

He said suddenly, not quite having taken the decision, "Yes, of course!"

XII

"A—A MESSAGE, Warden," Erik Svitra said nervously as he crossed the living-area of the Chevsky home. Somehow, since the moment when the warden spotted him and swept him up in his wake, returning to the enclave from the spot where Chart's ship rested, he seemed to have become—well—*involved*. There was an old-fashioned aura of politicking which informed this house; people came and went all day, and its owner sat holding court among them. Erik had conceived the blasphemous notion that a man bearing the only official, Earth-granted title in the enclave ought to get out and around a bit more, ought to feel the pulse of his community more directly. But he was a stranger, and on this alien-dominated world perhaps things operated differently.

Interrupting his conversation with the Dellian Smiths, Chevsky said, "What message? What about?"

"It's printed for you only," Erik said, and held out the small autosealed capsule which the communet had just delivered. That was a facility rare on more advanced worlds; he had wondered ever since his first day on Yan just what the purpose was of according such elaborate facilities to such a small and relatively poor community of humans.

"Excuse me," Chevsky muttered, and thumbed the capsule. It hesitated a fraction of a second before identifying him, then split with a pop and unreeled its contents. He scanned them.

"Well, I'll be . . . The bitch! The *bitch!*"

The Smiths stared at him, and Erik, and the other people in the room: nine of them. Erik had learned some of their names, but ever since that encounter with the gifmak drug his memory had had lacunae in it.

"Sid!" Chevsky said with magnificent disgust. "Hell, it's a plot, that's what it is! They're out to get me!"

"Who?" demanded Smith's wife. Rachel.

"Lem—and Pokorod—and Ducci—and the rest of that self-appointed gang of self-important bastards!" Chevsky rolled the message and capsule into a

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ball and hurled it at a disposer. "Know what they've done now?"

Heads shook on all sides of him.

"Sid's gone. Took a go-board route this morning and went without even talking to me!" Huge exaggerated tears formed in Chevsky's eyes, and Rachel handed him tissues to wipe them.

"She wasn't much!" he forced out through sudden sobs. "But she was a wife for me, and a man needs a wife!"

Heads nodded, just as they had shaken.

"Without even saying goodbye!" Chevsky burbled.

I wonder how she swung that deal, Erik thought. *I guess she must have had private credit stacked up. He'd insist on controlling their joint account. Lucky bitch! I wish I could afford a go-board route!*

"That settles it, then!" Chevsky roared. "We call a town's meeting on this! Put in a majority petition to Earth, get rid of those pompous bastards! I mean we want to see Chart perform here, right?"

"Right!"—in a chorus.

"Even if it's a performance based on the—the native traditions, not ours!" Chevsky put out his hand and someone thrust a full glass into it, some sort of beer. Erik had sampled it and found it sour.

He was fairly certain he knew who had fed Chevsky that line. Rachel Smith was possessed of a certain naive subtlety—if that were possible—and knew how to sugar unpalatable facts. He detected her influence in the next remarks, as well.

"After all, perhaps the great skill of this famous artist Gregory Chart will help us to understand our native neighbours better, ease our adjustment of life-patterns!"

Not that the notion registered well with everyone . . .

"In any case, though," Chevsky pursued relentlessly, "we've been fortunate in that Erik over there *not* only helped me—uh—save my face when my bitch of a wife wanted to screw me up . . ."

Pause. Several grins aimed at Erik, who stood there hating it but trying, from politeness, to grin back.

"*But* also tipped off a news-machine which had heard about Chart—and dashed for the go-board—and went into TE mode before Ducci and that meddling son of his could stop it." Chevsky leaned back expansively, stretching his arms and legs. "Thanks to which . . . I guess I didn't tell you before, but I just made some inquiries through the informat, and that news-machine was registered on *Earth.* So we can rely on the news about Chart having spread throughout the inhabited galaxy."

Pause. To let the statement sink in.

"Which means that we are going to be put well and truly on the map. According to the informat, wherever Chart goes a gang of wealthy tourists from Cinula, Ilium, Groseille, and even Earth go too, in order to catch his latest masterwork. The first time he hits an alien-type culture, they expect to like double the mass interest he regularly gets. Here's the biggest commercial proposition ever on Yan, isn't it?"

"I don't see Pedro Phillips here," said a voice from the corner of the room furthest from Erik. The speaker was someone Erik didn't really know, had only heard the name of, a certain Boris Dooley who had apparently wandered off the board a few years ago and stopped over longer than he meant to.

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He worked at reclamation and purification along with the Smiths.

Chevsky favoured him with a scowl. "Meaning—?" he invited, his voice taking on a dangerous purr.

"Meaning Pedro's the merchant of the enclave," Boris said. "Meaning if there were real commercial interest in the matter he'd be on our side. I want to know why Doc Lem, and Doc Pokorod, and the rest, are scared by Chart."

There was a short hostile silence. Erik said suddenly, not having intended to speak up, "I . . ."

All eyes fixed on him. He licked his lips.

"Well!" he said obstinately. "I mean I know *I* just dropped in here the other day. I mean I don't have too much say in this matter. But I have been around—like I made it to over thirty worlds already, in my professional capacity—and I do get this bad feeling about Chart, who's an Earthsider, taking on this big ancient Yannish scene. I mean, like, there are things out there we couldn't duplicate, right? I mean there are some of these Yan people who don't like humans. I mean . . ."

He spread his plump brown hands helplessly. "I mean I can feel like something *bad*," he concluded. "Last place I want to be when Chart cuts loose is right on the same planet. And that's my carefully considered opinion."

He could tell, just by looking, he had touched a sore spot in the minds of several of the people in the room. But Chevsky said bluffly, "Now look here, Erik, feller! You only just got here, you said so yourself! You leave the worrying to us, hm? You just enjoy your first stopover on Yan—or get back on the go-board if you don't like it. Leave the worrying to us old hands. *We* know what to do about all this!"

"Sorry," Erik muttered, and moved to take a chair in an obscure corner.

"Right!" Chevsky went on. "We were talking about calling a town's meeting, weren't we? Anyone here feel it's not necessary?"

No one.

"Good, then we can push ahead. I guess it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that we have right now and right here in this room an influential cross-section of the humans on Yan, and if we play our cards right we should be able to swing the meeting around to . . ."

Erik stopped listening. He was calculating whether his surviving credit would stake him to a go-board course for another world. Not necessarily a world where he could hope for good pickings in his trade—just somewhere other than Yan.

He could feel his spine crawl every time anyone mentioned Chart performing for these here alien natives. He had long ago acquired a healthy respect for the prickly premonitions he now and then experienced. The way he saw it, the best viewpoint during a Chart performance was from any other world bar the one where he was currently in business.

Of course, it would be a shame to leave Yan without having tried out this reputed sexual compatibility bit. But. . . !

Great artist! What does that not excuse? Hell! Like nova-ing a sun to study the effect of a sudden rise in temperature on the culture of its habitable planet!

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At approximately the same moment:

"Is there any means whereby we can constitute ourselves a legal entity?" worried Pedro Phillips. As a merchant, he was involved in interstellar trade, and owing to the risk of spreading disease, or unstabling precarious local economies, there were many many regulations he had to take into account. It followed that he would be the one preoccupied by legalisms.

It seemed equally fitting that Ducci should be the one to snort, and to say with force, "Legal? Legal precedents don't happen until the first time—and what we have here is a first time, isn't it?"

Around him, in comfortable chairs on Dr. Lem's verandah overlooking his famous i hedge, precisely that group which he had long thought of as "responsible" in the enclave—whether or not they had authority—exchanged sober looks and nods. At her master's feet, Pompy uttered a sigh. Like all chubbles she was sensitive to the mood of those around her owing to the vast olfactory zones on her back, and she was beginning to get annoyed with the continual crises she could detect through the stench of tension which assailed her. Last night, Dr Lem recalled, she had had a nightmare. That was the first since their arrival on Yan. She had clawed and scrabbled into bits a valuable Yannish rug.

This egocentric bastard Chart! Stirring us around like a pot of stew!

He said, hoping to introduce a calmer note, "Let's review what we so far know. Let's—"

"What is there to reconsider?" interrupted the normally calm Jack Shigaraku. He hunched forward on his chair. "We know Chart has received a favourable response, not only from the young apes, but from the conservative older Yanfolk. We know he's enlisted the help of Marc Simon, and whether or not one approves of his behaviour"—letting it be implied that he didn't, which was not surprising, because like all tutors on foreign worlds he had an acute sense of the continuity of Earthsider culture and wanted it to be preserved—"one must compute with the fact that he has the greatest understanding of Yannish of any living human. He's turned his coat, so to speak, He's . . ."

He cancelled the conclusion of the sentence, and sat back. But it was clear, Dr Lem realised, that everyone knew what he had been going to say.

"If only it hadn't been Morag Feng who lured Chart here!" Jack's wife Toshi mourned.

"But it was," Pedro snapped. "And we're stuck with the fact!" Having seized their attention, he continued: "As to making ourselves a legal entity, I've been consulting the informat and—"

The communet sounded. Dr Lem turned in his chair with a muttered apology, and as he reached for the floating extension which served the verandah heard Pedro doggedly ploughing on: "And I find that we, as a quorum of the total human population, have the right to declare ourselves a political entity. A—hell, what's the word? Oh, yes, a *party!* What we have to do now is this. When the next town's meeting is called . . ."

He suddenly grew aware that no one was listening to him. Everybody else had turned to stare at Dr Lem, and at the miniature communet screen which had drifted towards his chair. The

(Continued on page 127)

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WILMAR H. SHIRAS

Wilmar Shiras' Children of the Atom *made her a major name in our field twenty years ago, but it was only recently that she returned, in* New Worlds of Fantasy #2, *with the first of a new series of stories. "Backward, Turn Backward" introduced Mrs. Tokkin, the Professor, and the quite improbable sequence of events which Mrs. Tokkin takes such pleasure in narrating. Now Mrs. Shiras offers another of Mrs. Tokkin's stories, this one about a boy who was—*

SHADOW-LED

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

"OH, MY DEAR!" cried Mrs. Tokkin, coming upon me while I was in tears. "Whatever is the matter?"

Well, I told her, as best I could.

"I've always heard that boys steal," I concluded, drying my eyes, sniffling a bit, "but I never thought my boy would. Do I really have to keep my purse locked up? Oh, I'm sure you never went through anything like this with your children!"

Mrs. Tokkin looked suitably grave.

"There was a time—" she said. "But let me make you a good cup of tea first. And I've brought you some fresh-baked cookies."

Not until I had downed some of the tea, and had bitten into a cookie, would she begin her story.

It was Carl (she said). I had been feeling there was something wrong for several weeks; he did not eat properly at table, he was stupid and listless by day, and sullen—quite unlike what he had previously been. And then, early one morning, just at dawn. I heard the front door open, and when I went to my bedroom door and peered out, I saw Carl come in, yawning and dragging his feet. He went up to his room and tumbled into bed. Paul, my husband, was out of town at the time, so as soon as the children were off to school, I went to the Professor and told him what I had seen.

The Professor listened intently.

"Have small sums been missing from your purse?" he asked me.

"I can't be sure, but I do know I have lately suspected there might be," I admitted.

The Professor asked a few other questions, and then gave me instructions to watch Carl closely, without interfering with whatever he might do, and to report back in a few days.

So I slipped into Carl's room at night, after he had fallen asleep, and I watched. The light was dim, from the streetlight over the way, but my eyes got used to it and I could see him sleeping heavily in his bed. The clock downstairs struck the hours and half-hours as I waited. I may have dozed off once or twice.

But then the covers began to stir, and without moving at all, I watched in-

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tently. To my horror, I saw a dark shape crawl out from under the blankets, and Carl followed it. It seemed to be pulling him by the hand. As he stood up, stretched, and started sluggishly toward the door, I saw the dark shape was Carl's shadow.

It went before him, drew him out of the room, down the stairs and out of the house, while I followed. He wandered down the street, his shadow ahead of him. Once they stopped, and Carl, yawning loudly, bent and picked up something. It was a bit of coal, and with it he made some aimless scrawls on the next gagage door he came to. Then he dropped it and picked up a stick, and whacked idly at flowers which grew near the sidewalk. He pulled leaves off a hedge as he passed one, and dropped the leaves as he pulled them.

The night was cool, and I shivered as I followed him. After what seemed like a long time, his wanderings brought him home, and he went upstairs and fell heavily into bed.

Sleepwalking, I thought, of course. But the Professor shook his head.

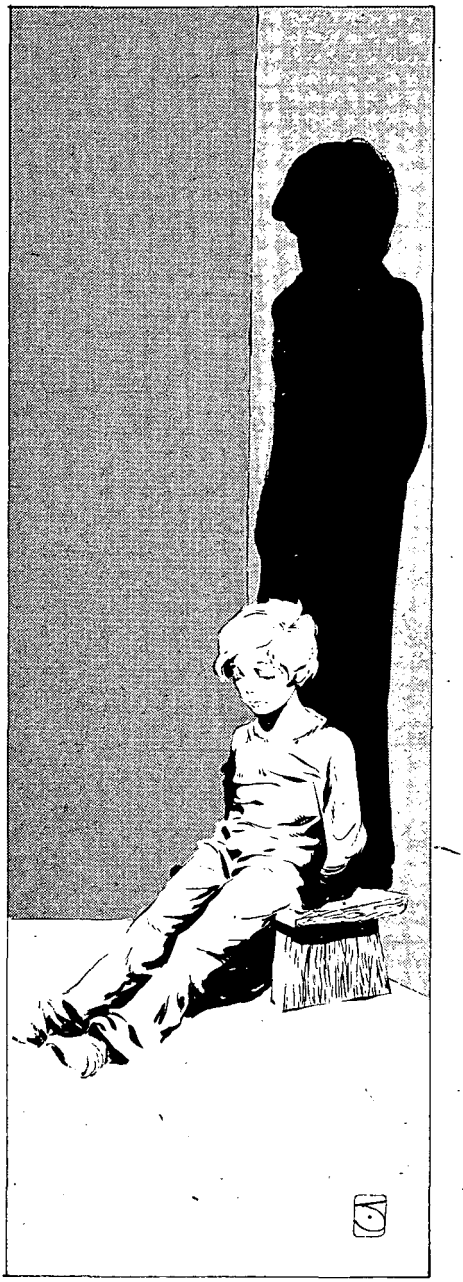
"Carl is shadow-led," he said.

This frightened me, especially as the Professor looked so serious.

"The trouble is," he explained, "that Carl's shadow is stronger than he is. This is not uncommon, especially in boys of his age."

"What can we do?" I begged.

"We must try to make him stronger than his shadow," said the Professor. "It is sleepwalking in one sense—Carl himself has almost lost consciousness. This random, purposeless behavior shows it. I could waken him, but at present it would be dangerous to try—



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there is so little in him to waken. We must build him up first."

Muttering to himself, the Professor began to hunt through his cupboards and to take down bottles, jars, boxes, and little twists of paper.

"Iron," he murmured, "and a little strychnine. Brewer's yeast. Salt blessed for Baptism. Calcium, for the backbone. Powdered heart of a lion. A little adrenalin. Three drops of holy oil for Confirmation. Thyroid, of course, Humm." I could not hear what he said next, with his head in the cupboard at the other end of the room. Then he came back, taking one or two other things from the shelves as he came. "Phosphorus for the brain," he was saying. "Old-fashioned idea, but no harm to add it, at any rate."

He mixed a formula, poured it into a bottle, and handed it to me.

"A spoonful in the morning, and another in the evening," he told me.

"But will he take it?" I asked doubtfully.

"Of course he will, if you are persistent enough. He hasn't enough gumption to refuse. Nor is the taste unpleasant enough to arouse active aversion. Feed him well—plenty of protein, plenty of red meat. A light sleeping-draught every evening, and, just to make sure, rig up a string across his door, so that a bell will ring in your room if his door is opened in the night."

Carl's condition did not seem to improve, and if anything it grew worse, but perhaps that was because I was watching him so closely and was so worried about him. He came home later from school every day, and the other children told me that he spent the time hanging about a cheap sort of place he passed on the way home, thumbing through the comic books on display, putting nickles into a machine to watch the marbles roll, and chewing gum.

At home he lounged about doing as near to nothing as a human being can. He kept close to the TV, but paid no attention to it. If you made any comment on a program he would say only, "Huh? I wasn't watching," or, "I didn't hear that." But if I turned the thing off, he was resentful. He would sit staring at his schoolbooks for half an hour or so, without turning a page or touching a pen, and then say, "It's done," and go re-read the little children's comic books, without smiling at all, only yawning from time to time.

It was difficult to get him to eat at table, and while he was always chewing gum, he didn't seem to take much interest in anything to eat, not even candy. It was a very difficult time for me, my dear. And I counted the money in my purse twice or three times a day, and found small change missing almost daily. But when I put his allowance at his place every Saturday morning, he would often not bother to pick it up and put it in his pocket. Usually one of the other children would run after him and give it to him.

This state of affairs continued for more than two months. The Professor then told me that I might omit the sleeping-draught and see what took place.

Two nights later the little bell rang in my room, and I was out of my bed in a flash. I hadn't undressed, because I had thought something of that sort might happen. Sure enough, Carl was going slowly down the stairs, with his shadow bobbing and bouncing impatiently ahead of him.

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They went through the living-room. His shadow fell on my purse, and when they moved on, the purse lay gaping open, all the coins gone, though the paper money remained.

It did seem to me there was a change, now. But it was a change for the worse. Carl walked on, but the shadow tugged him to a stop beside a fence. He tried to walk on, then, but the shadow grasped the fence with one hand and would not let him move. Then Carl took a piece of chalk from his pocket and began to mark on the fence, and so he went on, a wavering horizontal line of chalk on the fence marking his progress. They came to a parking strip planted with flowers, and the shadow knelt, and pulled at Carl's hand until he knelt also. He pulled the heads off the flowers, one at a time, and pulled the petals off and scattered them on the walk.

This aimless, restless sort of idleness had shown itself before at times, but with much less urgency.

Carl's shadow then tugged him on toward the cheap little shop where he spent so many of his after-school hours. You can perhaps imagine my feelings when he took up a stone, smashed the window and crawled through. He cut himself rather badly on the broken glass, but took no notice of that. Instead, he went to the gum counter, took a handful of packages of gum, and began to stuff gum into his face almost before he had the wrappers off.

And the alarm bells were roaring fit to deafen a person, but Carl did not heed them. I was at my wit's end what to do. The police siren sounded up somewhere in the distance and drew closer. And Carl was stupidly dropping nickels into that machine and staring at the marbles as they rolled, paying no attention to any of the racket.

I had meant to climb through the window myself, but knowing the police were on the way, I wondered whether I might not be arrested too, so I hesitated. Then I made up my mind to it, and got myself through as carefully as possible, just as the police car pulled up. I waved to the men and waited.

"It's my boy," I whispered to the first officer who came up to me. "He's walking in his sleep, or something. I followed but I didn't dare wake—oh, please be careful!"

The two officers looked, and sure enough, there was the boy, oblivious to the whole situation he had got himself into.

"Must be nuts," one said to the other.

They climbed in through the window, and the one in charge signalled to the other to get on the other side of Carl, keeping his distance and watching him. Carl tired of the marbles, or ran out of nickles, or the restlessness took hold of him again, so he moved to the magazine counter and began to tear the magazines to pieces, after a brief glance at each one.

"I'll pay," I was whispering urgently to the policemen. "I'll pay for it all—"

And the creeping policemen were getting nearer to Carl all the time.

Well, of course, I should have known that the Professor would be watching my house. He appeared at the window, all out of breath and only half dressed, and I was never so glad to see anyone in my life. It seemed to me that the policemen were glad, too.

"Had to run back for the medicine," gasped the Professor. "My patient, Inspector. Most extreme case of sleep-

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DAVID R. BUNCH

A man goes through life storing up frustrations, tensions, anxieties—looking for a way out. Wander down by the riverside some evening and you might find the answer in a—

DOLL FOR THE END OF THE DAY

ALONG THE RIVER that night there was a commotion among shadows, and one shadow seemed to be beating another shadow against something. As I drew nearer I noticed that it was just a human figure, a man, pounding some object against a limestone ledge. "Hey," I said to him, "hello!" But instead of answering me he just went ahead pounding away as a man might who had a lot of rock to break before sundown, and sundown coming along. But it was dusk already along the river where he worked; summery darkness was ballooning out from the cliff caves, and the lights of night were beginning to flash and flaunt in the city less than a quarter mile up the hill.

"Isn't it getting a bit late for what you're doing?" I asked, hoping that he might stop and talk with me and tell me what he did. But he seemed not even to hear me. He just worked on for five minutes more while his breath whistled ever more sharply, until his throat seemed completely to clog. Then he gasped a final gulp, gave the thing he was lambasting a tremendous, but almost soundless, thwack against the stone, dropped the lumpy, beaten object and appeared to be quite spent.

He turned then, just wheeled his long, big body until it was flat in front of the cliff opening where he stood between me and the river. I was fenced into darkness now between him and the land that sloped sharply up to bright lights of town. And I was apprehensive because I couldn't see his face very well; it was but a palish blur on top of his tall, quivery body. His hands reached out toward me but ended short in a gesture. "Who're ya?" he growled, "Who're ya to come interruptin' a man at his work?"

"I just happened to be walking by," I said. "Just came down to watch the river awhile before bedtime. Stuffy as an egg in my little sleeping room," I explained. "Hot, And my head aches."

"Yewr," he growled, "well, next time yeh're jes *walking* by to watch the river awhile before bedtime because yeh've been cookin' eggs in yehr damned little sleepin' room and got it hot, leave me out, see. Don't meddle."

"O.K.," I said, "O.K. But now that I've meddled," I said, "got you all sore and all, and made an ass of myself too, by bothering, can't we maybe talk some? You see, I work in this big office all day, and I'm lonesome. I'm lonesome for some friendliness, some off-duty face that's not a crafty, greedy, conniving—"

"Well, I'm not," he snapped back, "not lonesome a bit."

"No?"

"No, I'm not."

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"Well, anyway," I said, "I guess you've had your fun. But did the other thing?"

"Huh!?"

"Did the thing you were pounding enjoy the lambasting you just gave it?"

"Who knows?" he said in a little moment of lostness, "who knows?" Then he came back to the present and replied rather sharply, "See here, now, what I do with the *thing* is my own concern, personal, see. Because it belongs to me. And jes because I've found my own answers, don't ya be a busybody and meddle. Or I might jes—I might jes—well, I jes might."

"You might just what?" I asked him.

"I might jes show—" And without finishing the words his breath left in a great gust from where he had been holding it. Because certain blurry parts of him danced strangely, I knew he was trembling.

"Well, here now—would that be so awful?"

"Yeh'd see, yeh'd soon see."

"I'd like to," I said.

"Ya jes think ya would," he said, and I said I'd risk it, and he reached down for the object he had let fall. But he didn't let me see what it was; instead he put it in a crack of the ledge, and shadows hid the strange thing completely. "Whyn't ya jes take off home now?" he asked. "Yehr room's likely cooled down. Besides it's almost bedtime. And I'm tired." A piece of something dark blurred across about a third of his face, as near as I could tell, so I judged he was yawning. I knew I should leave him alone. Every cautious, trembly fiber of me told me to go. But every suspicious, curious, meddling, wondering human nerve of me said stay, stay and get the story and see what it is. See what it is if it kills you! "I want to see what it is!" I yelled, louder than I should have.

"Pipe down! Shhh—oh, pipe down! Want to bring the cops? And make them think we're suspicious characters?"

"No."

"Well, pipe down, then."

"I want to see what it is," I repeated, loud.

"No!"

"I want to see what it is!!" I said, louder, and finally I got so curious and hysterical about it all that he saw there was no other easy way. He reached to the ledge where he had put the object and drew the floppy figure from its place. "That's its home," he remarked, "that's good night unless I put it in the old kit for travelin'."

"Oh—" I said.

"Yes, 'tis. The old ledge is its little home while I'm sleepin', eatin' or battlin' with the faces uptown." Then he held it out to me, just handed it forth with both hands, slow and deliberate as a man might who held out a great offering. Or maybe like a man handing forth a sack of rattlesnakes. "Here 'tis," he said. "See!"

His thoughts were so much with the meaning of the thing he held in his hands that he had forgot about the dark. But I couldn't forget. "I can't see!" I yelled.

"Oh, well," he growled, "ya young pups— Want ever'thing jes right, don't ya? Get a chance for a peep and ya want someone to turn on a thousand-watt bulb."

"Yes!" I said.

"Oh, well, we could wait for the moon. But that's an hour yet as I reckon. Got any matches?"

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"Sure!" I ejaculated. "Cigarette lighter too. Want me to get a flashlight? I could maybe fetch a lantern or a light pot from the street workings!" I was excited. Things really had me going by now.

"Good God—oh, good God, ca'm down. It's jes a little old bundle of nothin' much, to anyone else—jes a little old bundle with faces and blood."

"Just a little old bundle—with faces and blood!? Oh, oh—my! Where'd that come from?"

"Out of a lot of places. Ca'm down. Where're the matches?"

I held them out to him, and he struck five at once. "See!" I looked hard, but the flash stunned my eyes. "Seen enough?" he asked.

"No! Take the lighter." I ignited it and held it out to him. He took it and showed me the *thing*, showed it to me for a long time. It got me. I was dumbfounded. "Well—oh, God," I said.

"Thought it'd get ya." He chuckled and seemed quite pleased.

"It did," I admitted. "It got me. All that bright, fresh blood! And that knobby, crazy—"

"Heh heh heh," he chuckled. "That's where yeh're fooled, that's jes where yeh're bad fooled. Why, some of that blood's years and years old."

"Is it!?"

"Sure. See, this is not jes any old ordinary *thing*. It's a very special sort of a personal *thing*. It's as full of corpses as graveyards are. Big graveyards, if ya get what I mean."

"Full of corpses as graveyards are! Oh God—big graveyards!?"

"Yeah. Ya know those places where things go when they're of no more use nor harm. None at all. Boy, when I get through with a face that 'as thrown dirt at me, it's really ready for the graveyard. I don't even bother to think about it anymore at all."

"Oh my!" I said. "Really?"

But by the small wavery light of my cigarette lighter he suddenly looked like a man who had just gone away in his thoughts for a long talk by himself. "These feet are jes some old carnival baseballs happened to be around," I thought I heard him mumble, "and that was a long time ago. The head I made from—"

"Sure, sure," I said, "it's cute. Real cute. But anyone can make a doll. —The blood though? Those big clots and blots!?"

"Mine."

"Yours!?"

"Heh heh heh. Ya think it come out of the *thing*? Or out of the rock? It comes out of me, like it always does fin'ly. Them clots and blots ya speak of are people's faces, people who've thrown knives."

"But I didn't . . ."

"Course they're faces. Jes' cause you can't make 'em out is no concern of mine. I make 'em myself. Cut myself with a razor blade whenever I feel I have to and jes make a new face on the doll, face of someone that 'as tossed dirt. Then I pound its bloomin' head right in."

"Well . . . ! Oh, God," I said.

"Sure, w'y not?" he went on in his tense voice. "Some people use the old razor blade to slash a wrist real good when they've been to the end of the rope. Others kill someone else, maybe, and get caught up for murder. Some of 'em they say are even nuts enough to go nuts about things. Heh heh. But me, I think ya got to admit I've found

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the better way. Even if it is a little, uh—different."

"Yes," I gasped, "it's different, it's very different."

"Thought maybe yeh'd like it when ya got to know it, heh heh. Ya need to use it, maybe?" He lurched nearer and thrust the blood-stained object toward me. "It's a real hex doll, in case ya hadn't guessed. All ya have to do to use it is be willin' to spend yehre own blood, gobs of it, for the faces."

"No! Oh, no!" I insisted, "you keep it. People are all just fine by me," I lied.

Then we stood very still for awhile. I seemed unable to move, and he stood holding his breath and reaching the strange doll toward me. I heard no sound except the river's monotonous and slow *yolop yolop yolop* against its stony edges. I wished I were back in my hot little sleeping room; I wished I had never spoken to this man; I wished I were anywhere but here. Then he said in a voice stretched tight across his held-in breath, "Get out! Yeh've seen the doll. And ya still don't have sand enough to use it. Get out! It's about bedtime, but I've jes thought of a lot more faces—weak, unreliable, lyin' faces—waitin' to feel the rock."

So I left as fast as I could and ran all the way up the hill. But just before I turned into the street where my room was, I looked back and saw the shadows start to reel. And suddenly I realized that my head was throbbing and aching . . . worse than it ever had . . . before. . . .

—David R. Bunch

(Continued from page 69)

walking—lucky you did not lay hands on him."

Whereupon he climbed through the window, marched straight over the Carl, took his arm, pushed up his sleeve and gave him a shot of something out of a small hypodermic, before anyone knew what he was about.

Carl staggered and the Professor caught him. Nobody else moved. Then my boy raised his head and spoke.

"What's going on?" he asked. "Hey—where the heck am I?"

The Professor looked at me and nodded.

"He'll be all right now," he said.

And that is just about the end of my story. The police were easily satisfied. Carl's surprise when he saw the bleeding cuts on his hands was obviously real, and boys who consciously burglarize a shop don't do it in their pajamas. The owner was satisfied when I paid for the damage.

Once awake, Carl soon became his normal self again, interested in everything, alert and friendly, playing games with his brothers and sisters with all his might, eating and sleeping normally. And whenever he went anywhere, his shadow trotted obediently at his heels.

I filled Mrs. Tokkin's cup again.

"And what was in the hypodermic?" I ventured to ask.

"I never knew," said Mrs. Tokkin.

—Wilmar H. Shiras

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Eliot made his debut in "The Prince of New York," by Greg Benford and Laurence Littenberg (June, 1970), and met his future wife in "How Eliot Met Jeanie" (February, 1971). Now Littenberg continues the surreal saga of Eliot and Jeanie and tells—

HOW ELIOT AND JEANIE BECAME PARENTS

LAURENCE LITTENBERG

"DO YOU HAVE the address?" Jeanie importuned.

"Yes," Eliot answered. He was on his hands and knees looking under all the furniture. "What did you do with my other shoe?" he demanded. "We certainly can't go without my other shoe."

"Why not?" Jeanie returned.

"Why not? Indeed, why not?" He got up and kissed her. "I love you, Jean Bien. Let's try again the usual way."

"We've tried, we've tried and tried now for a year," she said, somewhat resentfully; she was not happy about what marriage had done to her name. "Nothing's happened."

"All right, let's go."

They left the apartment, Eliot limping a little in one sock and one shoe, and descended to the street. Out on the sidewalk they came upon the little old lady who lived across the street.

"Hello, little old lady who lives across the street," Jeanie said. "Are you mad at us for getting drapes?" The little old lady had a pair of army surplus binoculars which she considered a better investment than a television set. The Biens' apartment was directly across from her window and they had been the mainstay of her entertainment until they bought curtains.

Except for walking a little faster, she ignored them. She reached the subway entrance before them and went down the stairs. As she walked through the turnstile a group of Little Leaguers (baseball bats and tire chains, but no zip-guns) ran out of the darkness and pushed her into one of the revolving doors. They rotated her all the way through and began squeezing her between the bars of the door and the meshing ones of the doorway. One clever eight year old wedged his bat into the doorway to get better leverage.

"Help!" she yelled until they squeezed the breath out of her. Eliot and Jeanie hurried past.

"Nasty children," she remarked.

"Um hum," Eliot muttered; preoccupied. He was reading something.

On the wall of the platform was a large poster bearing the admonition "Beware of the Subway Boar!" A cartoon continuity depicted a large porcine individual pushing savagely into the crowd, getting *on* the train before letting people *out*, elbowing his way through the car, and beating a frail-looking old lady to the last seat.

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The ride was long and they passed the time holding hands and kissing. Across the aisle a pair of sailors were doing the same. Aside from them the car was occupied by a blind man with a little card saying "You Can See, God Bless You," a one-armed man who kept reaching up and scratching his ear with his four inch stump, an acromegalic whose jaw thrust prognathously a full four inches beyond the rest of his face, a pair of middle-aged identical twins dressed exactly alike, a sufferer of *acne rosacea* (the disease was too far advanced to tell whether it was a man or a woman) who kept winking at Eliot, a squat, bald man in a girl scout uniform, a priest, a red faced man with a toy bird perched on his shoulder, a bent old lady whose left eye was much larger and higher set than her right (which made it very difficult to meet her gaze), four midgets in double-breasted herringbone suits, and a tribe of Puerto Ricans.

As the train neared the Biens' stop the man with the bird on his shoulder began rocking violently back and forth in what seemed to be an effort to dislodge the bird. Almost immediately he was elbowed in the stomach by the man in the girl scout uniform. He collapsed, bird still in place, onto the midget beside him who started to scream in a high but curiously unchildlike voice. The blind man became very excited and lashed out with his cane, striking several of the Puerto Ricans. They responded immediately, hoisting him up by his arms and legs and swinging him back and forth. The priest got up to try to stop them but tripped over the old lady who was down on her hands and knees groping for the coins which had spilled from the blind man's cup. "Damn you," she rasped, transfixing him with her uneven gaze, "can't yer watch where yer going? You priests are all alike, always getting in a body's way if yer not out stealing little children and worse." Most of this was lost on the priest because he was unconscious and anyway the sailors, wrapped in each other's arms, were screaming too loud for anything else to be heard. The train stopped and the Puerto Ricans flung the blind man through the opening door. Then they turned on the amputee and began dragging him around the car by his stump, conscientiously genuflecting whenever they stepped over the priest.

Eliot grabbed Jeanie and they fled up the stairs out onto the bright street. "Let's find a policeman," he said.

"What for?" she asked.

"To help those people on the subway car."

"They were doing all right."

"I guess they were," he agreed.

They had by now reached a store-window which appeared to look in on a maternity ward. In front of the rows of squalling babies the lettering on the glass said "THE FRUIT OF THE WOMB SHOP" and beneath that, "Babies Are Our Only Business." A tall, swarthy man dressed like an undertaker greeted them as they entered. "Can I help you?"

"Well, we're interested in a baby," Eliot said.

"There's a really cute one in the third row in the window," Jeanie added.

"Sorry," the salesman smiled. "Those in the window are all reserved. The customer orders the kind of baby he prefers and we select an appropriate embryo. Please let me show you." He ushered them out of the front room into a large laboratory. An immense metal

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vat, sunk halfway into the floor, dominated the room. The salesman led Eliot and Jeanie up a stairway and onto the wide lip of the vat. From there they could see that it was filled with a viscous, milky solution. A technician sat on a platform elevated over the center of the vat. Drops of sweat ran down his face and neck onto his stained lab smock. He was stirring the liquid with a huge wooden spoon.

Bobbing up and down in the liquid were a large number of transparent ellipsoids. Each contained a shapeless pinkness.

"What are those—things?" Jeanie asked with revulsion.

"Our plasti-wombs," the salesman said smartly. "They absorb nutrient directly from the solution and transmit it to the embryo. Very efficient. Let me show you one." He nodded to the technician who put down his spoon and, manipulating a small net, dredged up one of the ellipsoids. He wiped it off on his smock and handed it to the salesman who held it briefly up to the light. "Eighteen weeks. Already reserved (they usually are by the fourth month)," he explained, presenting it to Eliot.

"Ugh," Jeanie looked away.

Eliot stared, fascinated by the fishlike monstrosity.

"Rather small as yet but you can already see it is going to be a boy. Blond and dark-eyed if I am not mistaken." He looked at Eliot sharply. "Sir, please do not handle the zipper; that is for birth only."

"Here, you can put it back," Eliot said. The salesman handed it to the technician who tossed it back into the solution and picked up his spoon to begin stirring again.

The salesman turned back to Eliot and Jeanie. "If you would like we can reserve your baby now. Did you have any particular type in mind?"

"Well, we want a little boy, preferably dark-haired like my husband, and intelligent."

"All of our babies are first-rate," the salesman said, suddenly less friendly. "Come into the office and I will draw up the papers."

Back in the front room he began to fill out a form.

"By the way," Eliot inquired. "How much will this cost?"

"Nine hundred ninety-nine dollars and ninety-five cents."

"That's pretty steep."

"We have a time-payment plan for those who wish it. Your deposit can serve as a down-payment and you have as long as three years to pay the balance."

"What happens if you can't keep up the payments?"

"That does not happen very often, but in that case we must of course repossess the baby."

"Of course," Jeanie repeated.

"Well, you know, I'm afraid we can't afford a thousand dollars." There was an embarassed silence.

"Do you have anything for less?" Jeanie said, to break the silence as much as anything.

"Occasionally a customer is not satisfied with the baby when he sees it and refuses to take it, forfeiting his deposit of course. Those babies are reduced."

"Could we see some of them?"

The room the salesman led them to this time was plain and rather dingy. Three dirty babies lay in a single crib. The first was very thin; its ears were shaped wrong and the gap between its

(Continued on page 118)

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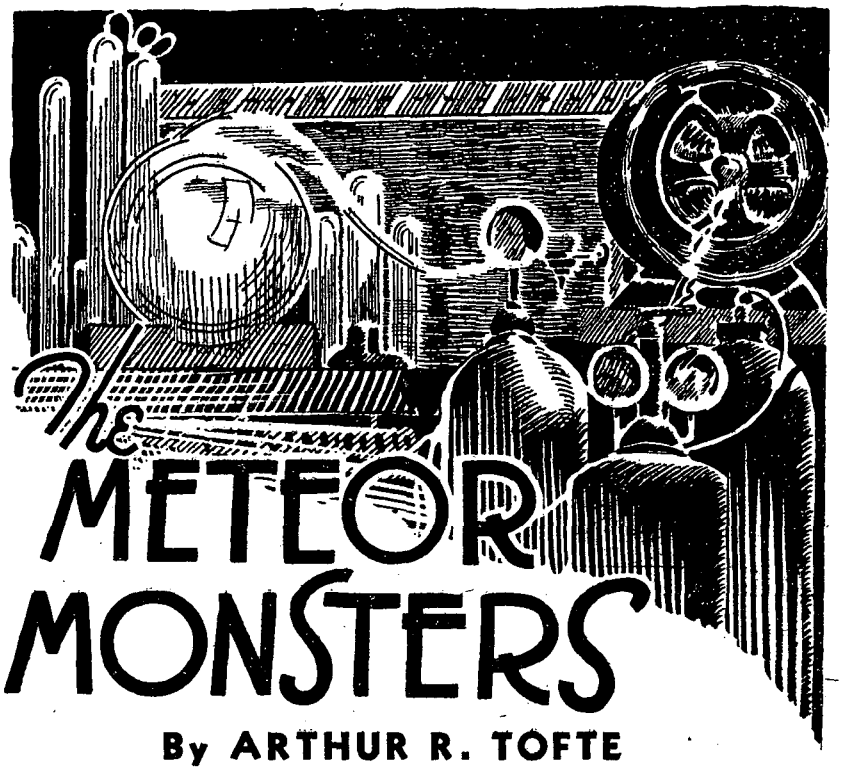

The METEOR MONSTERS

By ARTHUR R. TOFTE

A giant meteor plunges to earth—and the hopes of the world center on a boy and a girl trapped underground by weird vegetable monsters. ***A Fantastic Classic***

CHAPTER 1

A World in Convulsion

MORE happened to the world on that one November night than had happened in any century in history.

Between sunset and sunrise, between twilight and dawn—it seemed as though Fate concentrated all her surprises and made one big package of them—a fearful, death-bringing Pandora's box.

It began badly enough—

William Green, president of the United States of America was seeking reelection as the fusion candidate of the Democratic and Republican parties. His sole opponent was George Kent Grayson, Progressive-Totalitarian candidate from Wisconsin. It was election night. Troubled millions of people were sitting before radios listening to the reports as they came in.

Even the oldest and wisest of experienced politicians were hesitant to voice their opinions of the results of the election. Who could foretell an election like this? For out of the Totalitarian*

* The Progressive-Totalitarian party was an American counterpart of the European Fascist movements. In Europe the American Totalitarians were erroneously classified as Fascists.—Ed.

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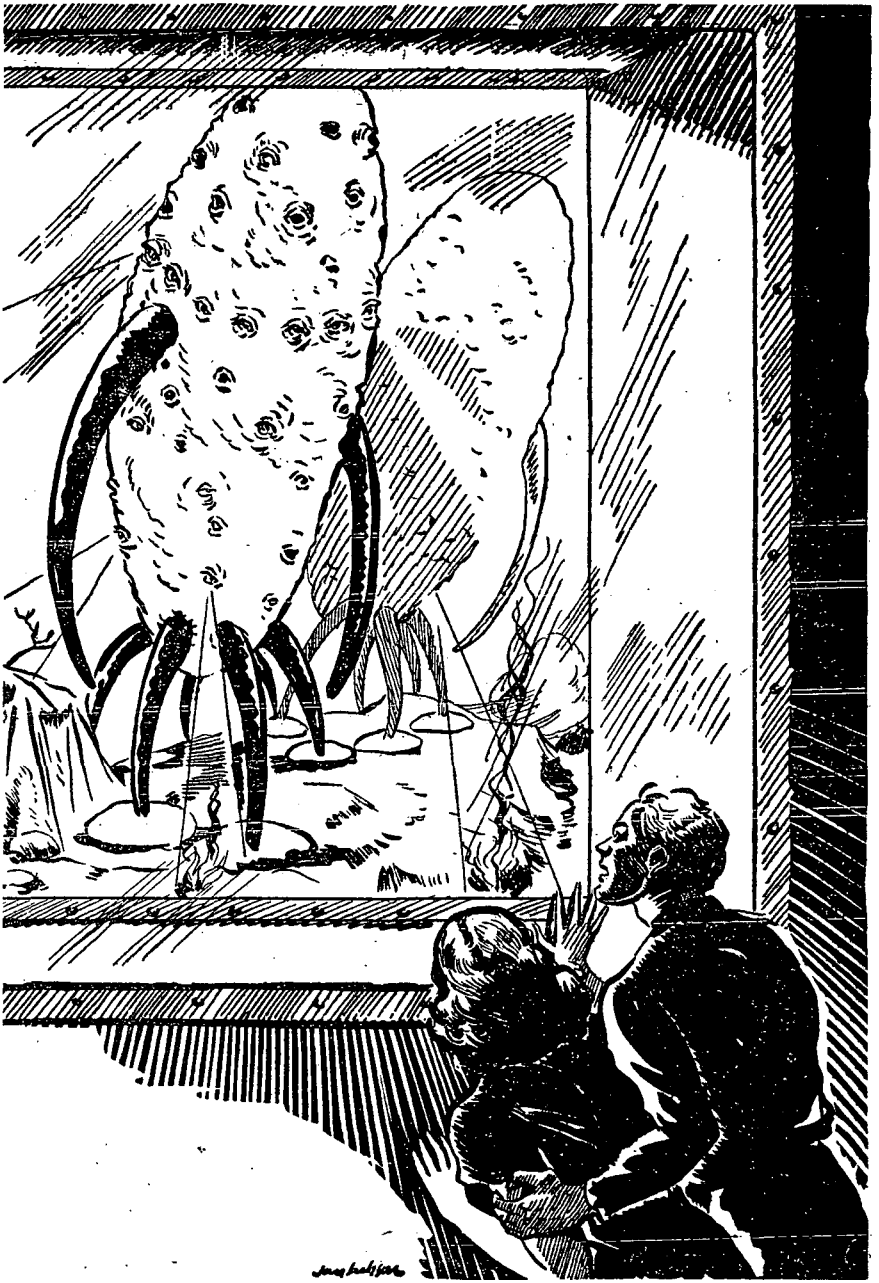

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inner circles had come a warning—a dire and altogether unprecedented warning. They would not accept defeat. If the ballots turned against them, they calmly promised a world revolution.

Thus was the setting laid for the start of that catastrophic and eventful night in November, nineteen hundred and forty-eight.

In America—everywhere was feverish activity or bated inactivity. Grim faced men were meeting in secret places. In homes, fathers looked at their little broods, wondering what the morning would bring. In barracks, soldiers lolled in nervous disquietude, eager for action and yet strangely afraid of the unknown forces they would have to face. At flying fields, planes with motors idling, were lined up for quick take-off. Navy yards were surrounded by lines of men in blue with bayoneted rifles.

Prisoners in jails kept up a mighty clamoring. To them, the upset conditions in the land meant possible release. Already plots and counter-plots were being bandied from cell to cell, from corridor to corridor. Lean, hard-faced criminals grinned with a deep and hungering satisfaction. Deep in their souls raced the call to fly out into this trembling world and to seize what was for all to take who would—gold, jewels, liquor, women!

In the large American cities many families had grouped themselves together for mutual protection. Many others families had stayed alone in their solitary homes, doors locked, windows clamped down, shades drawn. No one felt really secure on this dread November night.

And amidst all this suspended animation, it seemed that only the droning voices of the radio speakers had life. The reports were coming in slowly.

A WORLD was at its turning point. The evolution of centuries in economics, in government, in religion, in morals, in art, in literature, in living itself;—all these were to be thrown over in one tremendous burst of human passion. The layers of humanity that ages had built up were to be levelled out. Changes were coming — and people feared these unknown changes.

Even president William Green sat with his family, as millions of his fellow citizens sat, with his eyes fastened on the articulate radio, and listened to the reports.

At first the returns gave him a slight lead, and with this news had come word of riots in Chicago and Philadelphia. At midnight, eastern standard time, it was fairly certain that his lead was sufficient to capture a majority of the electoral votes and assure him of re-election.

Simultaneously with this report had come news of more riots. Most of the eastern cities were experiencing pitched street battles of varying intensity. Bands of marauders, men long out of work and desperate, appeared with rifles and belts of cartridges, seemingly operating as semi-orderly units in a general movement.

Radio announcers gave up the task of reporting on the election as new violences took place, as the larger cities began to sparkle and flame with machine gun rattle and the torch of the incendiarist.

At two o'clock panic had settled down on a badly frightened America. And far off across the water, the nations of Europe were shaking. Chicago in flames and disorder was matched by the leaping fires of old London where already thousands of men and women

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had fallen in horrifying street battles.

In America, peaceful citizens packed small belongings and tried to make their way out of the cities for the relatively safer rural communities. Those attempting to drive their cars were halted by bands of howling men and screaming women who pulled out the occupants and beat them brutally. The mob was running wild. Fifteen years of depression, starvation, inactivity, and governmental incompetence had pushed the huge crowd of humanity to such utter limits that the bounce back now was all the more terrible and vindictive.

Dawn, that November day, promised to show a bloody chapter to man's history.

But no one could have foreseen the whole awful tragedy that the dawn was actually to bring. Not the rioters, nor the escaped criminals, nor the soldiers, nor the weeping mothers—not one of them foresaw a fraction of the disaster facing mankind. For the real dawn that came was so fantastic in its horror, so unbelievable as to make any other dawn in the history of the world seem insignificant by comparison.

Much has since been written of that disastrous November dawn, but here for the first time is the complete story.

But to tell the story, we must forget for a moment that the world is in a convulsion, that men and women in one mad night are returning to barbaric beastliness, and we must go to a place of quiet and repose far from the throngs. Our story begins there.

CHAPTER II

Flaming Death from the Skies

LET us go to the private home of Professor Bergeson in the city of Madison, Wisconsin.*

* Professor Bergeson was on the faculty at the University of Wisconsin.—Ed.

Here was a haven of quiet on that eventful November night. To gray haired, keen eyed Axel Bergeson the red flares in the city down the lake shore to the east meant nothing—less than nothing. A football victory perhaps. Or some other affair of people. People! Bergeson's business was not with people. His eyes and thoughts were only for the mighty parade of the heavens. The news of the election, the threatened revolution, had never entered the cloistered mind of this unworldly astronomer. To him the night was exceptional only for its crystal clearness and because it offered splendid opportunity for photography.

But with him in his laboratory loft on the top floor of his house were two other persons whose ties with the outside world were stronger and who knew of the troubles brewing. And they whispered softly to each other in the half dark so as not to disturb the master at his work.

Louise Bergeson, the astronomer's daughter, was lying on the couch at the rear of the room. Paul Bennett, the chief laboratory assistant, sat beside the girl, and looked down with brooding silence at her pale, lovely face, framed, in its moss of faintly gleaming blond hair. Strange sounds had come to them from the outside and they looked at each other with troubled expressions.

"That sounded like shots to me," said Louise. "Do you think it could be?"

"I'd give a lot to know," the young man responded with a shrug of his shoulders. Paul Bennett was tall, but not athletic in build.

In more than one way he reminded Louise of her father—the same keen gray eyes, the same long sensitive fingers, the same kind of quick mind that solved his astronomical problems with concentrated attention that sometimes

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was forgetful of her. Louise loved this young assistant of her father's, but even now with her slender body outstretched on the couch before his moody gaze she wondered how much of his thoughts were on her and how much back at the other end of the room with Professor Bergeson and his work.

Paul was speaking—

"I've been hearing enough talk around the campus the past week to make me believe almost anything possible out there tonight."

"Yet somehow, Paul, I can't feel in any danger here," Louise murmured. "Dad seems so unaffected by everything. This old house. This room with its charts of the heavens—everything so old and removed from the world."

"Yes, I know," Paul answered, "but suppose your father were r i g h t about—" The young man stopped short, immediately sorry he had brought up the gruesome subject.

"About the meteor striking, you mean?" asked the girl.

AS Paul reluctantly frowned assent, they looked over to the other end of the long room where sat the older man, poised in that perpetual grotesque attitude which revealed his complete engrossment in his vigil of the star specked sky.

"What do you think about it, Paul?" the girl asked.

The astronomer's assistant shook his head wearily, "I don't know. He has figures and calculations to show a huge meteor is on its way now towards us. We can't see it. He says he notices other indications, slight changes in the behavior of all the bodies in the solar system. I don't know. I'm not up to his mathematics."

"And that queer room of Dad's down under the house," the girl went on, "do you think it would be protection enough?"

Again the young man shrugged his shoulders. "If a meteor came and hit directly here, nothing we could build would do any good. But if one hit a little distance away, it might hold up even if everything else around here were destroyed—all of Madison, for instance.

"I'll say this," he continued, "your father has used a lot of ingenuity on that vault thirty feet underground—all those carefully planned anti-earthquake devices, those successive layers of Lord knows how many different materials, that little cage for coming up to the surface, and those sending and receiving radio sets.

"Your father says if the meteor strikes near here, it's going to do a lot of damage. He wants to be prepared. If he weren't so blamed serious about it all, I'd have laughed it off a long time ago. But it is a rather terrible thought."

For awhile the two were silent. Outside they could hear occasional shouts and the sounds of what might easily have been guns firing.

"Wish I knew how the election was coming out," muttered the young man in an undertone.

"And I wish Dad would put up that star gazing for tonight, and let us go to bed," the girl added petulantly, wishing that she could wish other things too—for she wanted above all things that Paul Bennett give a little more of his attention to her and a little less to the telescopes and cameras.

But like two watchers to a play, who intuitively realize their own unimportance to its development, they remained where they were and turned again to look at the man at the far end of the room. The professor's grotesque attitude was even more pronounced than before, as though his body had lost all

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mobility and had become a stone base for his keen, peering eyes.

Then suddenly, even as they looked at him, they heard him cry out in a kind of inarticulate whimper as though the muscles of his throat had refused to function after such long silence. They saw his arms wave in a quick violence. Bennett slipped from his seat beside Louise and started for the other end of the room.

"Quick, Paul—photographic plates!" the astronomer called. The assistant came running, fully equipped.

"Take a look," he cried to the young man.

PAUL took Bergeson's place at the great telescope. A pair of stars shone as he had seen them shine a hundred times before. But no—what was that tiny red dot between the two stars? It had motion. Paul looked up at the older man.

"Our meteor," the latter declared with a jubilant cry. "Now they'll believe me. Just as I figured. Just as I figured. But we'll have to hurry. It will hit very shortly."

Quickly the eager eyed man took another look through the big telescope. A picture was taken with Paul's help. Louise, now thoroughly aroused, had hurried to her father's side. She too took a rapid look at the now alarmingly bright spot in the sky. It could already be seen by the naked eye.

Axel Bergeson broke into a broad smile of satisfaction. "Down to the room, children. Hurry. You've only a minute or so now. Paul, take Louise down. Take care of her, boy. Go now, I want to take one more plate."

But Professor Bergeson took no more photographic plates. When he heard the sounds of the young couple clattering down the stairs, his excitement suddenly drained away from him. Almost leisurely, as though an eternity of time confronted him, he turned back to the open place in the roof and with his naked eyes watched the now vast globe of red in its descent on a suddenly hushed world.

And Professor Bergeson was still standing there, a lonely, stooped figure, on that November morning, just before the dawn, when the crash brought a flaming death to the earth.

CHAPTER III

A Chaotic World

SINCE its cataclysmatic origin the Earth had probably never had such a stiff jolt as when the flaming meteor flew out of the clear sky that November morning and hit.

Those other meteors of which men had known and studied—the one in Siberia* that had laid waste such a vast

* June 30, 1908, a fiery body, coming from a northeasterly direction, fell in the forest between the Yenissei and Lena rivers in North-Central Siberia, just north of the railroad line. A great column of fire rose skyward and heavy black clouds formed. A deafening noise, louder than thunder and artillery cannonade was heard for hundreds of miles, in the cities of Yenisseisk, Krasnojarsk, Kansk, Nynendinsk, and Kirensk. A terrific air wave raised water from all rivers, lakes and streams, and carried animals and people before it. Seismographs at the Physical Observatory at Irkutsk, under the observation of Mr. A. V. Vesnesenski, indicated an "earthquake" located in upper Podkamennaya Tunguska. Exploration revealed the immediate area, surrounded by high hills, completely naked and deforested. All trees are still on the ground, tops spread fan-like away from the central zone. Everything within thirty kilometers was burned, and everything within fifty kilometers leveled to earth. The central zone is pitted with craters and greatly furrowed. The meteorite itself was not found.

The Carolina Craters were discovered by aerial photography. They are a long series of craters in a line, as though caused by a meteorite falling on a tangent with the surface and gouging out great holes as it bounced along. These craters are extremely ancient, and their presence is impossible to detect except from a great height.

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extent of forest land, the one in the Carolinas which in time unknown had bounced along leaving a series of fair sized craters — those others were but pebbles by comparison.

As the news syndicates reorganized their shattered forces, the frightful reports of the disaster began to reach the shocked, almost paralyzed world.

Millions of people had been killed outright in that one devastating moment before the dawn, caught without a chance in a death that was mercifully instantaneous. Other millions however lay bruised and shaken. Many would die for sheer lack of facilities to take care of them.

The whole of North America was deeply affected, even the topography of the continent had been changed. The middle west was a scene of ruin. Lake Michigan and Lake Superior had found outlets to the south and west and were slowly draining away. From the Appalachians to the Rockies not a city or town but was woefully changed.

Chicago was a pile of scattered debris, amidst which the survivors were clambering like hysterical monkeys looking for their lost ones. It was as if some child had maliciously mistreated his toy town and had left it in disorder for another clean up after his play-time of destruction.

AFTER twenty-four hours, communications had been re-established fitfully for most of the country—except for one blind spot on the map from which there was only silence. In a hundred mile circle, of which Madison, Wisconsin was the approximate center, nothing had yet been heard. Chicago, on the fringe of this fatal circle, gave only feeble response. Milwaukee, to the north was silent. St. Paul and Minneapolis reported at length that the destruction was beyond description. St. Louis from its piled up ruins sent out call after call for help—fires were raging throughout the city.

Even the nations on the other side of the globe gave reports of distress. Long dead volcanoes came to life, tidal waves swept many shore lines, bringing death and destruction, and everywhere had been a quick shaking of the ground. London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Moscow, Vienna, Tokio, Bombay, Sydney, Honolulu, Cape Town—all had their news of hundreds, and in some cases even thousands, of dead and injured from falling buildings. People on dry, flat lands had been the least affected. Though everywhere had been felt that mighty thump when the meteor struck.*

In Europe it was roughly estimated that probably one or two per cent of the total population had been killed. In South America reports were meagre and inaccurate, but it appeared that the percentage would run closer to five or six per cent. In North America, few dared to make an estimate. Guesses, whispered and as quickly refuted, put the loss at between a quarter and a third of the entire American population. That dead spot on the map alone would account for many millions, and the losses rolled like a diminishing wave from that cold circle.

As yet no real description had been given to the world of the place where the meteor struck. No one seemed to

* Not all of the damage was caused by the collision of the meteor, which, though vaster than any celestial object heretofore striking the earth, could not have shaken the whole planet. However, the sharp jar of its descent shook down great seismic faults, causing simultaneously all the earthquakes that otherwise might have occurred in their normal sequence, and opening again the giant fissures of the active volcanos, whose eruptions caused still further displacement of subsurface materials, and additional earth movements as a result.—Ed.

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have survived in that doomed area. And it was two days before planes could be dispatched from relatively unaffected eastern airports to survey the extent of of the disaster. Air mail aviators, with years of experience flying over the country, returned with awed statements that hardly a land mark could be recognized.

Those rolling hills and fields of southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois no longer spread below them like a soft rug, spotted with patterns of green woods, blue lakes, straight roads, and nestling villages. All was now an unrecognizable sameness of desolate, charred landscape. Most of the lakes were gone. White ribbons of road were still visible in places, but only in scattered and torn remnants. Villages were mounds of still smoking embers. The great wide forests were no more, and fields were gnarled and furrowed as by some mad, blind ploughman. With the roads impassable and landing fields uncertain, no one as yet had managed to penetrate very far into the circle to explore the full extent of the loss.

THUS, three days after the coming of the meteor, the world was just beginning to get back into its customary ways and to rebuild where destruction had visited.

The presidential election in America —what did it matter now? George Kent Grayson, Totalitarian candidate, had been in Chicago. There was no trace of him. The President of the United States lay stricken on a hotel bed in Washington. He had been in the White House when it collapsed like a house of cards. He was seriously but not fatally injured.

The revolution—what had come of it? Bands of marauders and thieves were still attempting to take advantage of the general disorder, but a new spirit filled the rank and file of citizenry. The hobgoblin of revolution no longer haunted them. The disorderly groups were quickly being dealt with. National discipline was being firmly re-established. Political differences, fascism, communism, democracy—all seemed transient trivialities under the stress of immediate needs.

Then—

On the fourth day, just as the world was making every effort to recover its shattered nerves, a strange thing happened—unexplainable, mysterious, impossible.

Everywhere in the middlewest—within 1000 miles of Madison in every direction—electrical power went suddenly dead!

Radios became silent while annoyed listeners fumbled with dials and tubes. Electric trains and street cars that were still running ground to a stop as brakes were applied by mystified engineers. Lights went out. Motors that roared in their mighty strength hummed to a queer, unreal stillness. Elevators halted between floors. Vacuum cleaners, washing machines, toasters, electric stoves showed their immediate uselessness once the unseen spark was gone. And it was that way *everywhere* in a vast circle 2000 miles wide!

For nearly two minutes this complete cessation of electric flow kept up. And then, just as suddenly, the power came on again. Radios blared out, motors resumed their roar, trains got under way, elevators continued up or down with their disgruntled passengers, and no one could explain it.

Announcers over the radio almost immediately confirmed the report that the phenomenon had been felt universally, though not so severely outside the stricken area. World-famed electrical wizards gave interviews that showed

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their complete mystification. It was a baffling puzzle for which the world was doubly unprepared, coming as it did so shortly after the disaster. It was uncanny, unbelievable.

That night religious fanatics stood on street corners and claimed that Doomsday was coming. They shouted that the meteor had been sent by an outraged God to punish the sinning world on the very dawn of world revolution in which brother would have fought brother. And in awed, hoarse whispers they said that the period of electrical deadness was the voice of God speaking his soundless warning to all mankind.

Twice the next day, and for varying lengths of time, the unnatural electrical stillness recurred.

Churches filled with silent, frightened people. And outside, the fanatics gathered sizable crowds and harangued by the hour. Places of amusement, on the other hand, sounded to the laughter of man and women of all ages, a laughter that rang too loud and too forced.

Frenzied efforts were made by experts everywhere to discover the causes for the weird happenings. In people's hearts grew a doubt. Were the religionists right? Was a vindictive God on high giving wicked humanity a thundering warning?

SOME of the greatest authorities in the world were persuaded to try to explain the situation. But each had his own opinion, based on guesswork, imagination, and a certain academic sixth sense. Albert Einstein was called from his retirement to speak his views. His speech was translated into most of the languages of the world, for at least he had a theory, a reasonable theory, and he offered a sensible plan of action. He said, in his mild way, that he was forced to associate together as of the same phenomenon, the arrival of the meteor and the strange behaviour of electricity. He ignored the claims that both were the acts of a vengeful God. But he did state his belief that the meteor might be more than a meteor and that some as yet unexplainable power on or in the meteor was responsible for the electrical inactivity of the two days. He recommended an immediate expedition to find and examine the meteor or such of it as remained after the crash.

The next day a squadron of six U. S. Army planes set out to locate the exact location of the meteor. If a landing place were unavailable, they planned to drop several men in parachutes at the site of the meteor. A few minutes after the formation had passed northward over Chicago and had just entered the fringe of the unexplored circle, one of the dead moments occurred, and a lone witness saw the planes settle down in long uneven circles. One by one the aviators jumped and all but one reached ground safely. Their only explanation was an instantaneous failure of the electric spark in the motors.

More planes flew into the mysterious circle and failed to come out. The periods of electrical deadness repeated themselves at frequent intervals now. Pilots hardly dared to take their planes off the ground. Electric trains ran by fits and starts. Few passengers had the courage to ride them. Even the steam and Diesel trains ran slowly at night and stopped immediately the current went dead.

Old fashioned flares and kerosene signal lights came back to use. Candles and wick lamps were resurrected from dusty attics. In motion picture theatres, audiences became accustomed to the short, dark silences. Crime grew more rampant than ever, until the police were at wit's end to prevent a total

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collapse of law and order. It was the third great strain on their powers—first, during the revolution, second, during the immediate aftermath of the meteor's arrival, and now in the sudden moments of darkness.

Morale was shaken everywhere. People met each other on the streets, looked helplessly at one another, and said nothing. The whole thing was beyond human experience and human understanding.

It was at this crucial period when the world was ready to fall again into chaotic disorder and confusion, another strange thing happened.

A radio amateur in Indiana with a low wave receiving set told some friends that he was catching a queer sort of message, and from his range finder it seemed, according to his calculations, to be coming from the as yet unexplored dead circle where the meteor had struck. He was waiting, he said, for better receiving conditions to make the words of the message intelligible.

Other listeners tuned in at the wave length he specified, and the next night heard the complete message.

CHAPTER IV

The Messages

HERE are the exact words that came over the low wave transmitters and were re-broadcast to a listening world:—

"This is Paul Bennett speaking from what was once Madison, Wisconsin. With me is Miss Louise Bergeson, only daughter of Professor Axel Bergeson, of the state university. We are thirty feet underground in a vault, specially created by Professor Bergeson for this very event which he foresaw some months ago. By means of a small cage we have been able to get to the surface and look about.

"People of the world, what was once the beautiful city of Madison no longer exists. Buildings are merely heaps of stone and brick, darkly stained by the fires which have been raging everywhere. The lakes about the city are gone—just shallow saucers of dry and wrinkled lake bottoms remaining. We have seen no other persons who may have survived the crash of the meteor. It seems impossible that anyone could have lived.

"The meteor fell to the north and east of us, we believe, because of the increased upheaval of the ground in that direction. Probably the exact spot would be somewhere on the north shore of Lake Mendota, though nothing is definitely recognizable in any direction we look. All we can see are strange hollows and small mountains surrounding us.

"The vault we occupy is practically self sufficient for Miss Bergeson and myself. We can breathe the outer air, or we can shut it off and use oxygen tanks. We are surrounded by layers of almost every known metal, in addition to asbestos and glass. We have food and water enough for several months. We have a radio receiving set as well as this low wave sending set.

"Now, people of the world, I have a very strange and fearsome story to relate to you, something I can hardly believe myself.

"Three days ago while Louise—Miss Bergeson—and I were seated in the cage looking out through the glass windows at the desolate scene, we saw a huge figure moving about among the city ruins to the east. At first we could hardly believe our eyes—the thing was so huge. It was easily two hundred feet in height. It walked upright like a man, but seem-

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ingly there was no head on its body. There were six long tapering legs holding up a huge barrel shaped body equipped with a number of armlike appendages. It walked in one direction, and without turning around, began moving in exactly the opposite direction. At length it moved away and out of sight.

"The next day the huge thing came closer, no further than a mile or so away. It was near mid-day, and we had an excellent opportunity to study the monster with our field glasses. At this distance we could see it resembled no animal ever before seen on earth. There seemed to be no face, no mouth, no eyes or ears, at least as far as we could tell from that distance. But very frightening it was, I can assure you.

"For a test we released a little pet dog which had come with us into the vault, and we watched him run toward the huge creature. Carefully with our high powered field glasses we followed the movement of the dog up to within a hundred yards or so of the strange being. Suddenly the dog stopped. Miss Bergeson watched the giant creature while I kept my glasses trained on the dog. Then, as if by some magician's trick, the dog vanished with a little blue flash into nothing, and the monster moved on.

"THIS morning we heard a terrific pounding on the ground overhead and rushed our cage to the surface to see two of the creatures coming directly toward us. We thought we were lost. But we stayed at the thick windows, our faces to the glass, taking what we thought was our last look at life. But at about fifty yards distance the two beings stopped.

"A more terrifying sight could not be imagined by the human mind. Man, with all his atavistic fear of lions and tigers, his dread of snakes and huge monsters, has never had to face such creatures as these two. Louise—Miss Bergeson—and I clung together in our fear.

" 'I'm afraid—I'm afraid!' she cried, hiding her face against my shoulder.

"It is only now, nearly eleven hours later, that I can look back on that sight with any degree of sanity. I remember noticing, however, that the things did appear to have some two score or so of small mouths at various places around the barrel-like bodies. The only reason I call them mouths is that they kept opening and closing like the mouth of a fish. Yet they were not mouths. Also at various places around the bodies were other spots that might be eyes. They look a little like elephant's eyes—very tiny, weak, and the skin around them is puckered and dried looking. Yet they were not eyes.

"The surface of the creatures' bodies appears to be a kind of tough, gray leather. The arms and legs do not move at joints like those of earthly animals, but bend as though made of rubber. The legs end in huge pads at the bottom, easily twenty feet in diameter. The arms go to a point and seem to have no hands.

"One other thing happened, I remember, while we watched the monsters from our cage. I had thrown out some empty food cans the day before, and even as we watched, the tin cans disappeared in bluish flares under the gaze of the giants. The sight took the last bit of courage we had left, so we finally left the windows, ran the cage back to the vault, and tried to forget the horrible death that awaited us on the surface.

"An hour later, when we looked again, they had gone.

"It seems that these two monsters

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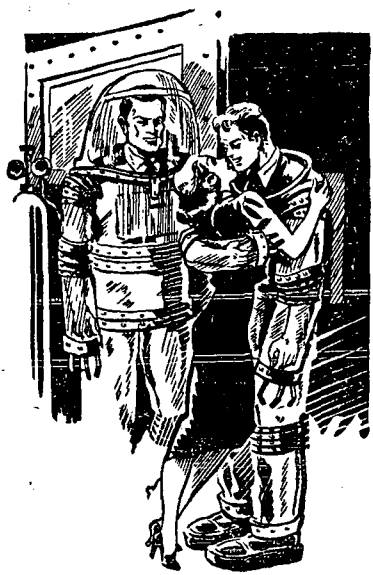
have a power far beyond anything possessed by any creature on earth. Our pet dog actually vanished from existence when one of the monsters noticed him. Also the disappearance of the tin cans gave us another indication of their strange power.

"It is possible that they possess a super-electrical force that enables them to destroy at will anything they see. Scientists, in laboratories, of course, have formed death rays of this type on a very small scale. But these giants seem to have the power to an undeterminable degree.



"If this is true, these monsters may have an endowment which will make them practically impregnable to mankind. Our own survival so far may be because we have never stepped from the cage while they were near. The cage has only a few of the protective layers of the vault itself. Largely it is made of glass, asbestos, lead, and duraluminum. Possibly something in this combination acts as a non-conductor to the death rays of the monsters.

"Tomorrow, my friends, we shall give further reports concerning the actions of these strange creatures."

And the next day, Louise Bergeson took the microphone and held a world spellbound with her description of the giants. In low, tremulous tones, betraying her womanly fear, she said—

"THIS morning there were three of the terrible monsters standing in a row before our cage when Paul and I rose to the surface. Sight of the third one, I am afraid, undermined my courage so much that I begged Paul to take me back to the vault.

"Let me state here, my listeners, that I am not the brave and fearless woman that my companion would have you believe from his own recital of what we have done together. He is the brave one. Every time I have seen the horrible creatures, I have been sick with fear.

"On the night the meteor struck, we left my father in the laboratory loft overhead, believing he was following us down to the vault. The laboratory, the very house itself, no longer exists. My father is unquestionably dead. As are all my friends here in Madison. Without our radio sets, it would almost seem to me that Paul and I were the last beings left alive on earth. Everywhere we look lies utter desolation.

"Three of the monsters were standing before our eyes only a few hours ago. We have no way of knowing how many more of the creatures there may be. We know they have a strange power capable of destroying whatever they see. Paul believes there is no question but that they came in what we have been calling the meteor. Whether animal, vegetable or fowl, we don't know. But without

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question, they form a terrible menace to all mankind.

"For this reason Paul has asked me to talk to you today. We here in the vault feel powerless to deal with these monsters alone. But as a woman, I make a call for three or four men, of courage and strength, to come to our rescue, not only to save us, but to rid the rest of you of this serious danger.

"Paul suggests that a caterpillar tractor be made at once, completely shielded with lead, glass, asbestos and duraluminum. Also to prevent stoppage because of the frequent failure of electrical power, Diesel power should be used for traction."

Following this talk, daily reports were made by Paul and Louise from their vault. No more than three of the monsters had appeared, but these three and their behavior and appearance gave topic enough for the two to talk about.

Wherever in the world people congregated, their conversation turned at once to the plight of the young couple in their underground prison and to a discussion of the monsters and their possible threat to mankind.

Paul, as a young scientist, attempted to advance various theories concerning the creatures, always carefully labelling his remarks as pure conjecture.

IT was his belief, after watching them for several days, that the monsters might not be animals at all, but a kind of thinking vegetable, grown very huge. It was also his belief that they came from a far distant solar system, and that the meteor was merely their own created and artificial means of covering the intervening space. Possibly on the sphere from whence they came, life had developed along different lines than it had on Earth. Instead of the animal kingdom dominating, on this far away star it was possible that the plant kingdom had evolved through millions of years to where there existed actual thinking, seeing, feeling vegetable-beings of the size and power of these monsters now roaming over shattered Wisconsin soil. A vegetable that was mobile and had eyes with unheard-of electrical potencies.*

Paul Bennett even ventured to say that it was possible that the dead moments when electricity failed to flow throughout the world might be when the monsters conversed with each other. Perhaps their vegetable minds were in themselves a kind of electric power plant, and conversation merely a matter of electrical energy sent and received.

And however fantastic and improbable these theories of Paul Bennett's should have sounded to the world, they were received by leading scientists as fascinating possibilities, each item in the long list of accumulating data to be con-

* These monsters from space have their earthly counterparts in partial mobility, in several types of plants, although none can actually uproot themselves and actually move about, however, the most apt example is the carnivorous plant known as the Venus Fly-Trap. This incredible plant shuts its leaf on an insect with lightning-like speed, immediately upon contact. There occurs an electrical charge comparable to that which occurs in the human body upon contraction of a muscle. Many other plants possess the ability of motion, from the natural turning toward the light, to the responsive reflexes of certain types of climbing vines, whose tendrils coil and uncoil at the touch of a human hand. Vines possess the power of directed motion by the sense of touch, in seeking the object upon which they climb.

The electric charges of the eyes in these meteor monsters are not so incredible when we consider that there are many instances of living things, living plants, possessing the ability to give off electrical potencies. An example is the Sensitive Plant. Also the rotation of the living matter inside the cells of the stonewort Nitella is electrical; and even in the ordinary upbuilding of carbon compounds occurring in the green leaf of every plant we find the process is partially electrical.—Ed.

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sidered as something to be gloated over and studied.

And then, after another week, the young couple in the vault were informed that a shielded Diesel tractor with three men aboard had entered the dead circle north of Chicago and was heading for their rescue.

CHAPTER V

The Insulated Car

SLOWLY and cumbersomely, the heavy Diesel tractor with its layers of glass, lead, asbestos, and duraluminum, crawled across the pitted, scarred surface of southern Wisconsin toward Madison.

One late afternoon, Paul and Louise, from their cage, saw the tractor moving clumsily in their direction. Quickly they scanned the horizon for sight of the unearthly monsters but they were nowhere in view. And then like shipwrecked people at sight of a sail, they threw arms around each other, caressed and danced in the tiny space, and in the exuberance of the moment, threw open the door of the cage and ran out shouting and waving their arms wildly. A blare of a horn came from the car to let them know they had been seen.

And at that moment, with the Diesel caterpillar machine making its way laboriously across the almost impassable surface, Louise chanced to glance off to the north. She made a soft cry of warning to Paul. One of the monsters had come into view in the distance. Without a word, the young man seized Louise's hand and shoved her through the cage door. He clattered in behind her.

"Can't take any chances now," he yelled, the joy of seeing the rescue car only half erased from his face by the sudden fright of its appearance.

Possibly the monster had seen nothing at all, for when they looked out again, it had disappeared over the hills. The car, however, was now but a few hundred feet away.

Several minutes later, three weary men stepped from the car door and were taken down one by one in the cage to the vault where Louise gave them welcome and attempted to make things comfortable for them.

There was a Dr. Thornton Davis, six feet three of man, looking more like a blacksmith than the army-surgeon he was. His hair was bushy and very black. A cold, fierce expression in his face showed great energy and a certain nervous impatience, as though his very size demanded big problems, and he couldn't wait to solve them. Dr. Davis was a kind of militant saviour of mankind—warlike, fearless, and in a way he represented the outraged feelings of the world against these impossible monsters from far away.

Then there was George Bevic, the engineer-mechanic of the expedition, middle-aged, with hard, horny hands, but with soft, gentle eyes. A professor of metallurgy at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he had been chosen by his colleagues in science not for his academic knowledge and standing, but for his utter practical dependability. And he had brought the car through as they said he would.

The third of the company was young Don Parker of the New York Times, the current flash in journalism. When it was suggested a newspaper man go in the rescue car, the various news agencies united on Parker. For it had been this red-headed, devil-may-care lad, hardly half way through his twenties, who had scooped the German-Polish war three days before it was supposed

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to start, even before the Polish secret service learned of it. It was Don Parker who single handed discovered the long unknown accomplices to Hauptmann in the Lindbergh kidnapping. It was Parker whose genius for news had skyrocketed him to the unquestioned choice as third occupant of the tractor going into the dead circle around Madison.

ALL three of the men were wearing suits impregnated with glass, asbestos and lead, with helmets of a semi-transparent combination of the same three materials. Paul and Louise joyously helped the men out of their clumsy suits. Don Parker, in spite of his obvious attempts to hear what was being said and to be gallant to Louise, nevertheless almost immediately slumped down in a corner and went to sleep.

As they ate the meal Louise prepared and served to them, Dr. Davis and George Bevic plied the couple in turn with questions. It was some time after they had finished eating when Dr. Davis suggested they make a report to the world via the low wave radio set.

Paul rigged up the sending apparatus, and in fifteen minutes Dr. Davis had given a graphic description to the listening public of their fight against odds in reaching the vault. Time and again, during the trip, they had to retrace their way for miles to pass around deep chasms or to get around rocky crags. The speaker praised the courage and stamina of his companions, and promised that on the next day he would relate what they saw when they took the car out to inspect the monsters at close range.

That night the five people slept as best they could in the cramped quarters of the vault. Early in the morning, Paul awoke Dr. Davis and took him up in the cage to show him the three monsters standing in a row before the windows, obviously looking at the tractor.

At sight of the giants, Dr. Davis laid his hand on Paul's arm and whispered in awe, "My God! No wonder you two kids have been frightened. I had no idea, no idea . . ."

Later Paul brought Bevic and showed him the sight. And finally he took Parker up in the cage. The young journalist had a camera with him and was obviously nervous and yet eager. And more than the explosive Dr. Davis or the phlegmatic Bevic, Parker grew excited at the strange sight, and even a bit hysterical. It wasn't until the cage had taken them back to the vault did he realize that he still held the camera in his hands and he had forgotten to take any pictures.

After breakfast they discussed their plans, and it was decided first to find the location of the meteor. Paul Bennett and George Bevic volunteered to go.

Louise helped Paul to put on one of the impregnated suits, but before the helmet was clamped down, she burst into tears and pressed her lips against his.

"Don't go," she cried softly. "I can't lose you too."

"I'll be careful," the lad answered, a little sorry at having an audience to this bit of sentimentality. For in spite of their confinement together, Paul Bennett was still a trifle blind to Louise's feelings for him. He was first of all the ambitious young scientist, with the opportunity of a lifetime for unusual study. If he had thought of it at all, he would have said this was no time for love making. But then, for him, so far there never had been. He had always pushed the impulse back, as he now pushed Louise back, and motioned to

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Bevic that he was ready to start out.

TOGETHER they went up in the cage and out into the car. First they went west and north to avoid the cavity that had been Lake Mendota. Louise and Don Parker and Dr. Davis watched the tractor as long as it was in sight.

All day Louise sat in the cage, sometimes alone, sometimes with Dr. Davis, but more often with Don Parker, who seemed very anxious to get her complete story while all the details were fresh in her mind.

In his impressionable way, young Parker had fallen in love with this sad eyed, fair haired girl. To him the whole affair was one of adventure and romance, and this girl was the thing that made it human and real. Possibly this very quality, of falling in love with his assignments, was what made him such a first class reporter on human interest stories. His heart warmed to this lonely girl. She was lovely. She needed protection. What if she had kissed that Bennett fellow! That didn't mean anything. So Don in his gayest mood set about to amuse and entertain the girl while they waited. And very often, in spite of her worries, his quips brought a smile to her lips.

When sunset came, the two men had not returned. Morning found them still missing. In fact it was late that day before Louise called down to the two men in the vault that she had just seen the car coming crazily across the bed of the lake.

All three of the monsters were standing as had become their custom in a line about two hundred yards from the cage and about one hundred yards from each other. They were like three huge vegetables that had mushroomed up to gargantuan size. Only the blinking dots on the bodies high overhead gave any indication of intelligence—a most evil and sinister intelligence.

Slowly, erratically the car kept on across the dry lake bed, up the former beach, and on a line that would carry it between two of the mammoth creatures. Seemingly they paid no attention to the tractor, except that the multitude of eyes appeared to blink a little oftener.

The car drew up near the cage and stopped. The two men did not get out. Nothing happened.

It was more than an hour later, when the monsters had at last moved off out of sight over the north horizon that the door of the car finally opened and Paul appeared. Parker and Dr. Davis rushed out of the cage to see what was the matter, and together all three helped to carry in the limp body of George Bevic.

Then, in the vault, while Dr. Davis was examining Bevic, Paul Bennett, exhausted as he was, rigged up the radio sending apparatus and told an eager world what he had seen.

They had gone west and north around the empty Lake Mendota. The country became even more difficult to traverse —the surface was gnarled and torn and utterly without a shred of living vegetation. All day they had pounded along. Toward sunset they saw dimly in the twilight that they were approaching a vast pit in the ground some mile or so ahead. And just before dark settled down they saw the three giants approach this huge pit to the east of them and seem to leap into it.

The two men slept in the car that night. As soon as it was light, they began again their difficult task of getting close to the edge of the tremendous pit, the opposite side of which could not be seen, so far across it was. It took more than an hour to make half a mile, and to get closer seemed altogether impossible.

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So far the monsters had made no appearance.

George Bevic said he would climb over the remaining half mile and look down into the pit. Paul reluctantly watched him go. He saw him get close to the edge, slowly clamber over some last obstructions, and then suddenly stop and fall. For a moment, Paul thought the older man had slipped and fallen into the pit. But in a few seconds he saw him again, clambering wildly back around the obstructions, and across the rough ground. Several times he fell, scrambled to his feet, and ran on.

AND then, behind the fleeing man rose a fearsome object. The blood in Paul's veins froze with horror as he saw the huge barrel-body of one of the monsters come slowly up over the edge exactly where Bevic had stood a moment before.

Paul started the car at once, and damned his impotence to help the scrambling, hurrying, obviously frightened man whose steps were already faltering. Bevic was just able to reach the car and still gasping for breath fall through the door.

And then, instead of driving back around the lake bottom, Paul had taken a chance and gone straight across the dry bed.

When he had finished his recital, Paul's place at the microphone was taken by Dr. Davis who made a short report that George Bevic was dead. He said that parts of the body, probably where the suit was weak in impregnation, were seared away, as though cut out and the adjoining tissue burned.

That night the American congress met in emergency session. High army and navy officers made lengthy speeches with suggested campaigns for annihilating these menacing figures. Debate among the congressmen raged furiously through the night. Plan after plan was discussed and tossed aside.

And in the little vault in Madison, Dr. Davis, Don Parker, Paul and Louise sat in deep silence, each trying to evolve a plan that would end the threat of great danger that overshadowed them. It was Dr. Davis who finally insisted they get some sleep.

The next morning, Dr. Davis told Don Parker to get his suit on—they were going out. In fact they were going to wage a two-man war on the creatures.

"Frightened?" asked Louise of the young reporter as she helped him on with his suit.

"Me—naw! I'm not scared of those big, clumsy bullies," Parker boasted with a flourish of his hands.

Dr. Davis looked over at the youngster and smiled, "Well, Don, either you are a fool, or else a damn sight better man than I am."

Parker grinned sheepishly.

"Come on, kid," Dr. Davis said more soberly, "you are just brave enough and fool enough to make you a good man for this job."

Paul and Louise watched the men drive the tractor directly toward the one giant that was moving aimlessly about some several hundred yards to the east.

The two in the cage saw the car stop, saw the tiny turret turn, and finally saw the sputter of smoke as a machine gun rattled and poured forth its stream of swift lead toward one of the legs of the monster. But Paul looking through his field glasses could see no change in the behaviour of the giant. It seemed not to have noticed the stinging shots, but merely continued to shift from leg to leg. At length the door of the tractor opened, Dr. Davis descended

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quickly and hurled in rapid succession a half dozen or so hand grenades that puffed like harmless squibs at the feet of the monster.

THE creature stopped its aimless motion as Dr. Davis scrambled back into the car. Then it took a step forward. Quickly, vindictively, as though highly provoked, the giant made a second step and lifted the twenty foot pad of one of its feet directly over the car. From the side doors, the two men fell out. One of the two could be seen to roll over and over and then disappear. When the foot descended, Paul and Louise closed their eyes and clung together. They shuddered thinking of the one man that had not managed to roll away.

Almost immediately Paul looked out again and saw the monster moving slowly off to the east. What had been the car was a small, flattened circle of shining stuff. Of the two occupants nothing could be seen.

At length when the unearthly being had gone from sight, Louise cried out that she had seen something move near the remains of the tractor. And regardless of the danger, unprotected, Paul left the safety of the cage and ran toward the spot.

He found Don Parker struggling to pull himself along the ground on his hands and knees. Both legs seemed useless, and the youth's expression was one of extreme horror. Paul lifted the reporter's body on to his own back and made his way heavily across the rough ground to the cage.

Dr. Davis' kit was still intact in the vault, and Louise quickly got to work to do what she could for Parker. Both his ankles had been badly sprained in falling into one of those innumerable chasms that cut up the surface.

Paul related what had happened over the low wave set and received instructions as to what to do for the ankles.

That evening the three of them decided that there was nothing more they could do about the giants. Their salvation would have to come from outside. Parker tried to joke about it, but for once his witticisms fell flat. And in the end he grew silent with the other two and a feeling of mutual helplessness passed over them.

CHAPTER VI

A World Doomed

AS the days went by, and the weeks, Paul Bennett made frequent reports to the world. The giants were to be seen less often now. They appeared to be engaged in some undertaking out on the dry bed of Lake Mendota.

One day he reported that the creatures seemed to be setting up some sort of huge framework consisting of three long girders or beams.* They were set up like a huge triangular pyramid, and the monsters seemed to be stringing wires on all three sides from the apex of the pyramid down to the lower edge. Paul could give no possible explanation for the queer structure.

A few days after the work of wiring was completed the three in the vault, as

* The giant girders used by the meteor monsters were later discovered to have been lifted bodily from the antennae towers of the Madison radio station. Analysis of fragments showed strange differences in molecular construction, not natural to the original steel. It was thought that this change was somehow wrought by the vegetable monsters electrically, possibly through the strange power contained in their potentially electrical eyes. Also, at the base of each beam was discovered traces of an element, metallic, but not before known to science. This is believed to have been brought with the monsters on the meteor, or perhaps is even an actual part of the weird beings.—Ed.

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well as everyone else on earth, were startled to hear excited reports from scientists that the planet was changing its age old course in the solar system. Already it was between two and three degrees off normal. And the weather was getting noticeably warmer. It was also discovered that the earth's rotary motion was slowing up. The globe was leaving its accustomed path around the sun and was going on an angle that would carry it closer to the sun for a time and then straight on past the sun's influence out of the solar system entirely into the great, cold void beyond. It was estimated that in another two weeks, the earth would be close enough to the sun so that human life would be made impossible, and in three weeks no life of any kind would be able to exist.

Everybody on earth would be dead in two weeks! It was stunning, unbelievable. A sudden chaos of fear fell on the world.

Hysterical insanity ran rife through the nations. Increasingly had a religious fanaticism seized the people so that huge praying throngs would rise to their feet and run madly to destroy places of amusement now unbridled in their licentiousness. Bands of men became crazed in their fear of mass death. Women were nowhere safe from beastliness. Police forces, whole armies disintegrated when it was realized nothing mattered any more.

Two weeks to live! Two weeks that would be getting hotter and hotter until there was no more enduring it and people would drop like scorched moths around a candle. Men left their normal tasks to wander aimlessly through city streets and over country fields, often with a favorite child carried in their arms. Thousands and thousands of men and women took their own lives, unable to bear the thought of imminent death.

Paul and Louise and Don Parker in their cage looked out at the baking earth, at the triangular pyramid, and then at each other helplessly.

THAT night a plea was made to the three in the vault by a delegation consisting of George, King of Great Britain; Mussolini, former Premier of Italy; Adolf, Emperor of the Germanic nations; Comrade Stalin of the Soviet Republic; and a long list of other notables. The survival of the human race depended on the three in the vault, and a humble world begged them to do something, anything, that would avert the disaster.

Don Parker's ankles had healed, and he walked with only a slight limp up and down the tiny space in the vault.

"Want us to do something, do they?" he laughed, and threw his arms over his head in a typical gesture. Paul and Louise sat silently looking at the floor.

"Look here, you two," the young reporter cried a little crazily. "How's this for a grand story — young newspaper man saves world from destruction and gets a five dollar raise from his paper. Listen to this—

"Three pieces of vegetable matter fall to earth in a meteor and cause a lot of damage. Young reporter, Don Parker by name, handsome and somewhat of a lady killer, goes out to solve the mystery. He finds a beautiful young girl. He falls in love with her. Yes, Paul, this newspaper guy falls in love with your girl. Don't look at me like that. I didn't even think you had sense enough to know she was your girl. But said reporter sees it plain enough. It's his business to see truths, even when they hurt. And the girl just won't take a tumble to this handsome newspaper guy.

"And then, my dear children, these

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three vegetables set up a rigging that draws the earth into a new track across the heavens. The world gets scared, and calls on the brave young journalist to save them. Two billion people beg him to do something. And one very lovely blond girl sits six feet from him and looks at the floor.

"But he, swell guy that he is, forgets the fair haired girl and the dumb fellow she thinks she is in love with, and sets his mind to saving the world.

"Says he to himself, this rigging they put up out there is a magnet attached deep down to bed rock and drawing the whole damn planet off some place the vegetable men want to go. And supposing they really are vegetables, maybe that's what they came for. Maybe their own little garden kinda ran out of fertility, like any field that's been farmed a long time, and they figure they'd just up and steal the old world from under our feet and take it back where they want it — just a nice fresh field for their damned vegetable friends to wallow in.

"And here's where our hero Don steps in. He's blamed if he's going to give up to a turnip or a rutabaga or whatever these things are. He's got a plan, and he's going to put it through. Listen—"

Paul Bennett was staring up at the youngster. "Do you know, Don, maybe you're right. That pyramid might be a sort of magnet drawing the earth out of its orbit. What's your plan?"

"Well," the young man hesitated, "when Bevic, Doc Davis and I came here, we brought several boxes of a special explosive the U. S. government had been keeping secret. It's back there in the corner with the rest of the stuff we brought. How about busting up that business of theirs, Paul?"

The young scientist nodded silent agreement, a smile of anticipation coming to his face.

PARKER glanced at his watch. It was ten o'clock in the evening. He looked again at Paul. "What's keeping us?" he asked with an answering grin.

Quickly the two men took off their clothes, except for heavy shoes and shorts. Up on the surface they knew the sun-heated ground was still sweltering, and the task of carrying one of the boxes of explosives promised to be hot work. Louise stood at the door of the cage and watched them with swimming eyes.

"Well, kid," the reporter whispered hoarsely to her, his body already streaming with perspiration, "wish us luck."

But the girl threw her arms around the young man's neck and kissed him on the lips. Then she turned to Paul and held him close to her for a moment and kissed him too.

With the heavy box between them, the two men moved slowly off into the darkness of the night. The tiny darts of their flashlights could be seen now and then by the watching girl, for despite the terrific heat on the surface, she preferred to stay there. She felt less alone looking out at the world from the cage than in the solitary vault below.

For several hours Paul and Don Parker tugged and pulled and lifted the heavy box of explosives over the rough lake bottom. When at length they reached the nearest corner of the metal pyramid they were exhausted almost beyond their strength. For a time they lay on the ground and let a little of the weariness seep out of their bodies.

Finally at a word from Paul the two began to push the box of explosives as far back as they could under the huge base of the thousand foot beam. When it was as far under as possible, Paul lighted a long fuse that would give them plenty of time to get back to the vault.

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And then as quickly as they could, they jogged their way back to the cage where a wildly excited girl greeted them.

They descended into the vault. Being air tight, it allowed no sound of the explosion to come to them. There was nothing to be seen until daybreak, so they curled up in their respective corners and tried to get some sleep.

At the first gray of dawn, all three were at the windows of the cage looking toward the pyramid. As it became light enough to see, they realized with a sudden disappointment that the structure was much too vast to be affected by their little explosive pop. With their field glasses they could see no change anywhere.

Then they saw one of the giants hurrying toward the pyramid, saw him pause and hurry away. A little later he returned with the other two, and all stood looking at the part of the structure where the men had set off the explosive. One of the monsters reached an arm over and touched the beam.

And while the three in the cage watched, they saw the beam sag slowly. The giants put more arms under the sagging beam and tried to lift it.

"We've done something," stated Don joyously. "No vegetable is going to make soup out of me."

Later the heat of the sun grew so intense on the surface that the three humans in the cage could no longer stand it, and went down to the relatively cool vault below. Occasionally one of the men went up to see what progress the three creatures were making in bolstering up their broken beam.

And scientists reported joyously that for the day, no increase in the earth's deviation could be noted. If anything there had been a slight return to the normal course.

THAT night, Paul and Don Parker again dragged a box of special U.S. Army explosives over to the framework and put it below the base of the second beam of the triangular pyramid. This night they watched the explosion from the cage—a livid flame in the darkness that lighted up the whole empty lake bottom in one mighty fulguration of blazing brightness.

At dawn they could see that the structure was badly off balance. The one good leg of the triangle was being pulled slowly toward the two broken legs. The giants were busy at work trying to bolster up the two broken struts.

And that day, with the sun hidden by clouds, the temperature fell to nearly one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. It was almost comfortable again. Besides this, scientists reported another movement of the globe toward its normal course.

On the third night, the two men, weak from their exhaustive efforts and the unusual heat, again prepared to take another load of explosives to the lake bed. This time they planted it below the most distant base of the triangle. Without thinking of the additional distance they had to return, Paul cut off the same length of fuse he had used the first two nights.

After lighting it, they set off on a trot around the base of the structure toward the vault where Louise was awaiting them so anxiously.

Just before they struck off across the lake bottom, they heard a heavy thump behind them, and their hearts sank. The monsters had come back in the darkness.

Not daring to use their flashlights, they stumbled wearily on, as quietly as possible. A series of thumps on their right, sent them scurrying off in

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the other direction. Then more thumps ahead made them realize they were completely headed off by the huge creatures.

But they had to go on. To reach the vault before the explosion took place, they would have to run for it even now. So with pounding hearts they decided to risk the giants. Across the rough surface of the ground they raced. Up the slopes and what had been the shore line. But where was the cage? They had had no time for following landmarks.

"Halloo!" called Parker, hoping Louise would show a light to guide them by.

A heavy thump behind them made them turn quickly. There against the night sky loomed a huge black figure. It was almost on them!

Little dots like lights gleamed at various places around the barrel shaped body. Long dangling arms waved this way and that across the star-lit sky. The two men crouched down behind a large boulder and shivered with fear.

The creature was no more than a hundred feet away when the explosion came. Don and Paul cowered even lower behind the sheltering rock. Pieces of stone and metal dropped all around them for several minutes.

When the two men looked again, the monster was hurrying into the lake bottom to join his fellows. And at the center where the structure had stood was now a pillar of fire, a flame that spread and widened rapidly. Even as they watched, they could see the giants moving about at the edge of the growing fire from which huge billows of smoke arose reflecting the whole magnificent glare of the conflagration.

Then great as it was, the fire seemed to gain sudden momentum. It jumped and leaped like some living thing, and the heavy clouds of smoke soon all but covered the scene. Nothing could live in such an inferno. Even the figures of the giants could no longer be seen.

"Oil," said Paul to his companion. "Only oil burns like that. They might have struck oil in putting down those beams, or our explosives might have stirred up something. But oil in Wisconsin! What a lot the geologists didn't know."

IN the gleam of the fire, they could now readily make out where they were. Off to the left they caught a glint of reflected light from the top of the cage. Louise would be there, looking through the windows at the fearful sight in the lake bottoms below, tears coursing down her cheeks for them. For them!

When they finally appeared at the door of the cage, the girl seemed unable to grasp the fact of the return. She could only cry out that she had given up all hope for them.

Nor was their return much too soon, for already the fire of the burning oil was at the lake shore a short distance away. It was almost as though the lake bed had suddenly filled with oil and the whole of it was burning.

Quickly the three descended to the safety of the vault.

Later when Paul rigged up his sending apparatus for giving a message to the world, he discovered that the wires melted when he sent them up to the surface. It must be an inferno up there.

The next day Paul attempted to take the cage up, but a blast of flame and heat drove him back.

The vault itself, despite its elaborate insulation, kept getting hotter too. The air they breathed, while chemically pure, had a smell to it like foul air in a

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gassy furnace room. Their lungs burned.

On the third day following the start of the fire, Paul found it possible to get the cage to the surface and look out again over the twice burned countryside. A fire was still raging in the lake bed at the center, flames rising high, and the air was heavy with smoke. But it was bearable and they hoped with considerable faith that the monsters were no more.

An hour later, three young people, two men and a girl, with food packs on their backs, struck out from the vault which had been their home for long weeks, and headed south and east away from the burning lake bottom.

It took them two weeks to reach sight of the first man, and another week before they could be transported across country, cheered and fêted and honored at every town on the way.

In Washington, the three made their reports to the leaders of the world's nations, assembled to do them honor. They in turn learned that the course of the earth had straightened out again and humanity was no longer threatened with doom. The turning of the globe had been slowed considerably, so that now a day and a night consisted of nearly twenty-seven hours. And also the temperature, it was estimated, was going to be stepped up some ten or fifteen degrees all over the globe. This meant that considerable of the polar ice caps would melt, with a corresponding increase in sea level. Some low coast lands would have to be abandoned, but the increase in usable marginal lands in the north more than offset this. The weather was going to be just a bit warmer, that was the main thing.

AND then finally, after all their social and other duties were completed, Don Parker, Paul Bennett, and Louise Bergeson took leave of each other. That is, Don took leave of the other two.

"Didn't I tell you," the reporter said with a wide grin, "no parsnips were going to snip my young life in two. And remember what I said about getting a five dollar raise? Say, they offered me the whole blamed paper. But me—I'm too modest, so I turned it down. I told 'em I just wanted a few days to write out the complete story."

Don paused as he winked at Louise. "And I'm making it a love story. Anyway it has a love story finish. Come on, you too, let's see a good old-fashioned love story clinch at the ending. Come on, Paul, if you don't grab her soon I will."

Don looked at the two and sighed as they put arms around each other, "Yes, I guess that will do all right."

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L. Sprague de Camp

Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers

eldritch yankee gentleman

part two

In 1921, at a convention in Boston, another amateur journalist introduced Lovecraft to a widow of Russian-Jewish origin, seven years older than he and having an adolescent daughter. This was Sonia H. Greene: a tall, well-built, handsome woman with a good job in a department store in New York. Although she had lived in the USA from the age of nine, Mrs. Greene showed all the extraversion, volatility, impulsiveness, and compulsive generosity common among pre-Revolutionary Russians. She was vigorous, enterprising, strong-willed, and "cannot keep still for two consecutive seconds." A greater contrast to the primly inhibited Lovecraft would be hard to find.

During the following year, Lovecraft corresponded with Mrs. Greene and sometimes saw her in Boston. In the spring of 1922, learning that Lovecraft's friend Samuel Loveman was coming to New York, she invited both men to use her apartment in Brooklyn while she moved in with a neighbor. After some persuasion, Lovecraft came.

This was the farthest from home that Loveceaft, thirty-one, had been. Sonia took him to an Italian restaurant, where he ate Italian food for the first time and acquired a taste for spaghetti. He had many "evenings with the boys." The next August, Lovecraft went to Cleveland to visit Loveman, who showed him art work from Clark Ashton Smith in California and started correspondence between Lovecraft and Smith.

Otherwise, Lovecraft stayed in Providence for the next year and a half. On business trips to Boston, Sonia stopped off at Providence to entertain Lovecraft and his aunts and to go on long antiquarian walks with Lovecraft. Once she submitted to him the outline of a weird story. When he waxed enthusiastic, she suddenly kissed him. "He was so flustered that he blushed and then he turned pale. When I chaffed him about it he said that he had not been kissed since he was a very small child."[17]

Lovecraft had been writing Sonia several letters a week. The letters developed into a courtship, in which Sonia probably took the lead. Lovecraft wrote that he wanted to move to New York; Baird's buying of several stories had encouraged him.

But changes impended in *Weird Tales*. It had lost Henneberger many thousands of dollars, and Henneberger was looking for a new editor. He also made contact with Harry Houdini, the escape artist. Henneberger proposed that Houdini write a regular column for his magazine. Since Houdini knew little about writing, it was proposed that Lovecraft collaborate.

The column never materialized, but Lovecraft did compose a tale, "Imprisoned with the Pharaohs," on the basis of suggestions from Houdini. The story, ostensibly written by Houdini in the first person, tells of his being seized by a gang of Arabs

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at night near the Sphinx of Giza and lowered down a burial shaft. At the bottom, he finds a horde of indescribable monstrosities performing unspeakable obscenities.

Lovecraft wrote a rough draft of "Imprisoned with the Pharaohs" in longhand and typed the final version. In March, 1924, he took the train for New York—absent-mindedly leaving the typescript in the station at Providence. Luckily, he still had the rough draft.

Next day was his wedding day. He insisted on St. Paul's Chapel in the Wall Street district, not because he had been converted to Episcopal theology but because Admiral Lord Howe and other baroque notables had worshiped there. Sonia spent her wedding night reading the rough draft of Houdini's tale aloud while Lovecraft typed.

Then they left on a one-day honeymoon in Philadelphia, which they spent alternately sightseeing and typing. Back in New York, they settled into Sonia's Brooklyn apartment. Lovecraft had his furnishings sent from Providence, because "I could not live anywhere without my own household objects around me—the furniture my childhood knew, the books my ancestors read, the pictures my mother and grandmother and aunt painted." His letters were full of high spirits and a determination to make his mark

He soon had his chance. Henneberger wrote from Chicago, offering Lovecraft the editorship of *Weird Tales*. It was the best job offer Lovecraft ever got, but he turned it down. "[Sonia] wouldn't mind living in Chicago at all—but it is Colonial atmosphere which supplies my very breath of life. I would not consider such a move. . . ."[18] So Henneberger hired Wright, who was living in Chicago and had sold several stories to *Weird Tales*.

Writers have described Lovecraft as "sexless," which does not seem to have been really the case. During the early months of his marriage, he seems to have performed his husbandly duties adequately if without great enthusiasm. The charge of "latent homosexual tendencies" has, however, become such a fad that it is leveled at almost any notable, including Lovecraft, whose love life is the least unusual.

As far as the evidence goes, it is probably true that Lovecraft had a low sexual drive. Otherwise, there is nothing to support the "latent homosexual" charge. Late in life, Lovecraft, with a certain wonderment at his own earlier innocence, wrote that he had reached his thirties before he learned that homosexuality actually existed in the modern world and not just in ancient Greece.

Then, hard blows rained on the Lovecrafts. Sonia quit her department-store job to open a millinery shop, which quickly failed. *Weird Tales* teetered on the edge of bankruptcy, so no money was forthcoming thence.

Lovecraft went job-hunting with little success. He got a job as traveling salesman for a debt-collection agency. After one day, the manager kindly explained that "a gentleman born and bred has very little success in such lines of canvassing salesmanship. . .where one must be either miraculously magnetic and captivating, or else so boorish and callous that he can transcend every rule of tasteful conduct and push conversation on bored, hostile, and unwilling victims."[19]

Other prospective employers asked Lovecraft what work he had done in their lines. When he said, none, they replied, sorry, nothing here. He ran an advertisement as a "writer and reviser" in the New York *Times*. He wrote and circulated a long, pedantic-sounding letter of self-

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recommendation, but it produced no jobs. Neither did the scores of personal calls he made in response to help-wanted ads.

He tried all the openings he could find for editorial work. Had he been taken on, he might, with a little seasoning, have proved an excellent editor. But all he got were a few little editorial tasks from Henneberger, whose *Weird Tales* was doing better under Wright.

By September, the Lovecrafts had to sell their piano. Sonia collapsed and entered a hospital. When she was released in a few weeks, they went to a farmhouse in New Jersey for her convalescence. In December, Sonia received a promising job offer from a department store in Cincinnati.

Lovecraft balked, saying he dreaded moving to the Midwest and would rather stay in New York "where at least he had some friends."[20] So he moved to 169 Clinton Street, Brooklyn, where he found to his horror that he had orientals as housemates. No sooner was he settled than a burglar made off with all the new clothes that Sonia had bought him.

Sonia's health went bad again in Cincinnati, and she had to return to New York to rest. Then she got another department-store job in Cleveland and departed, leaving Lovecraft alone save for weekends.

Lovecraft continued his writing, ghostly and otherwise, and got a temporary job addressing envelopes. His main recreation was the weekly meetings of the Kalem Club, so called because the names of all the early members began with K, L, or M: Kirk, Kleiner, Koenig, Leeds, Long, Lovecraft, Loveman, McNeil, and Morton. They met at the house of Frank Belknap Long. All had a strong interest in imaginative fiction, thus foreshadowing the science-fiction fan clubs of the next decade.

Lovecraft had come to hate New York. The skyline, the colonial relics, and the friends failed to balance his aversion for the masses, especially the immigrant poor. His letters were filled with rant against "a verminous corpse—a dead city of squinting alienage" and "The organic things — Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid — inhabiting that awful cesspool." When he gave vent to an anti-Jewish tirade, Sonia would gently remind him that, after all, she was of Jewish origin:

Later H. P. assured me that he was quite "cured." But unfortunately . . . whenever we found ourselves in the racially-mixed crowds which characterize New York, Howard would become livid with rage. He seemed almost to lose his mind. And if the truth must be known, it was this attitude toward minorities and his desire to escape them that eventually prompted him back to Providence.[21]

It is strange that a man, emotionally low-keyed, kind and generous to friends and acquaintances, interested in the ancient and exotic, and priding himself on an objective, dispassionate outlook, should develop such hatred for people who had never harmed him, merely because he disliked their appearance, accents, and other superficialities. In most scientific matters, moreover, Lovecraft was a hard-headed, skeptical materialist, giving short shrift to Charles Fort, Atlantix, Elliot Smith's heliocentric theory, and all occultisms. Yet he fell hook, line, and sinker for the blatantly pseudo-scientific Aryanist cult.

After Hitler came to power in 1933, although Lovecraft castigated Hitler's ideas as "asinine" and "ridiculous" and his methods as "grotesque" and "barbatrous," he still condoned Hitler as "sincere and patriotic"—"an honest clown whose *basic* objects are all essentially sound." These "objects" were the protection of Germany's "Aryan culture stream" from "the stigma of Latin mongrelization" and from being "debased and effeminated and con-

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taminated" by the "profoundly alien and emotionally repulsive" Jewish culture.[22]

Posthumous psychoanalysis is at best a conjectural business. Still, there is some evidence for the unconscious drives that made Lovecraft, during most of his life, as xenophobic as the most violent Southern nigger-hater. As a child he was rejected by his peers; as an adult he had many failures. Now, xenophobia is a common defense against knowledge of one's own failures and shortcomings. The xenophobe consoles himself with the thought that he is at least better than *those* bastards.

Furthermore, like most intellectual introverts, Lovecraft was an outsider in his own world. He blamed his own discomfort and timidity, in contacts with ordinary Americans, on the presence among them of ethnics and aliens. He defended his ego by railing against "aliens" and saying: "I hate any foreign ingluence;" but in point of fact, *he* was the alien. He would have felt completely at home only in a milieu populated by H. P. Lovecrafts, and few of these exist.

Finally, although a very erudite man, Lovecraft was also wont to pontificate on subjects of which he had the merest smattering, derived from books without the corrective of personal experience. And he never learned to distinguish objective fact from subjective reaction. If I say that X is "good, right, noble" or "bad, wicked, evil," I am not saying anything significant about X. I am merely exposing my own attitudes towards X. Likewise, when Lovecraft called Jewish culture (about which he knew nothing) "repulsive," he was not making a factual statement about Jews. He was only expressing his emotions towards what, in his ignorance, he imagined Jewish culture to be.

So Lovecraft became more and more unhappy and neurotic. In 1925 he wrote "He." This tale begins with an autobiographical passage wherein a young New Englander, who has come to New York full of illusions, learns otherwise:

Garish daylight showed only squalor and alienage and the noxious elephantiasis of climbing, spreading stone where the moon had hinted of loveliness and elder magic; and the throngs of people that seethed through the flumelike streets were squat, swarthy strangers with hardened faces and narrow eyes, shrewd strangers without dreams and without kinship to a blue-eyed man of the old folk, with the love of fair green lanes and white New England village steeples in his heart.

When Sonia visited him, Lovecraft lamented: "If I could live in Providence, the blessed city where I was born and reared! I am sure, there, I could be happy."[23] In April, 1926, Sonia packed his belongings and sent him back to Providence, promising to follow. Back at 10 Barnes Street, Lovecraft wrote letters full of rhapsodies on his happiness at being home again. Then Sonia came.

Eventually we held a conference with the aunts. I [Sonia] suggested that I take a large house in Providence, hire a maid, pay the expenses, and we all live together; our family to use one side of the house, I to use the other for a business venture of my own. The aunts gently but firmly informed me that neither they nor Howard could afford to have Howard's wife work for a living in Providence.

In his mid-thirties, Lovecraft had not yet escaped the domination of his older female relatives. They did not mind his living off his wife's earnings in New York; but in Providence, where they were known and had a position to keep up, it would never do.

Sonia then worked in New York and Chicago, with visits to Providence. In the spring of 1927, she invited Lovecraft to visit her in New York. He came but declined to resume marital relations.

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Lovecraft still wrote her reams of letters; but Sonia, dissatisfied with a marriage by correspondence, began urging divorce. "He tried every method he could devise to persuade me how much he appreciated me: a divorce would cause him great unhappiness; a gentleman does not divorce his wife without cause, and he had none." She persisted, and in 1929 he got a divorce on ground of wilful desertion. In 1932, they visited in Connecticut.

I believe I still loved Howard very much, more than I cared to admit even to myself. Although in my travels I had met many eligible men and some offering proposals of marriage, for eight years I had met none who did not seem inadequate in intellect compared to Howard. When we parted for the night I said, "Howard, won't you kiss me goodnight?"

He said, "No, it is better not to." . . . I never saw Howard again.[24]

The ending was not wholly sad. Sonia moved to California, married a retired professor, Nathaniel A. Davis, and lived happily with him for ten years until he died. The last I heard, she was still alive in her nineties.

In 1921, Lovecraft wrote "The Nameless City." The narrator tells how he found these ruins in Arabia:

There is no legend so old as to give it name, or to recall that it was ever alive. . . It was of this place that Abdul Alhazred the mad poet dreamed on the night before he sang this unexplainable couplet:

That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange aeons even death may die.

The narrator explores the ruins and finds weird carvings and mummies of a race of small, civilized dinosaurs. When he starts out from a tunnel, he is forced back by a shrieking wind, in which he thinks he hears the voices of the spirits of the former dwellers. As he struggles to the surface, against the sky he sees "a nightmare horde of rushing devils; hate-distorted, grotesquely panoplied, half transparent devils of a race no man might mistake—the crawling reptiles of the nameless city."[25]

Although not bought until after Lovecraft's death, the story is excellent of its kind. Like many of Lovecraft's works, it was based upon a dream. "Abdul Alhazred," which is pseudo-Arabic, was a make-believe name he had taken as a child.

Two years later, Lovecraft wrote "The Festival," which he sold to *Weird Tales*. As in "The Nameless City," there is no dialogue, but a slow buildup to a climax of horror. The narrator comes to Kingsport in response to a tradition that he shall celebrate Yuletide with his kin. He joins a throng of silent, hooded folk streaming into a nighted church and follows them to an underground crypt, where strange rites are taking place. A horde of bat-winged, webfoooted things appear, and the people ride off on them. When they try to get the narrator to do likewise, he leaps into an underground river and escapes. Lovecraft mentions not only Abdul Alhazred but also Abdul's *chef d'oeuvre, The Necronomicon*, in the library of Miskatonic University at Arkham.

The third story of this series was "The Call of Cthulhu," written in 1926 and published two years later in *Weird Tales*. This narrator inherits a clay tablet bearing a relief of a monster, like a squid-headed man. A police inspector from New Orleans, reporting on a sinister cult in the bayous, produces a stone statuette of a similar monster and tells of the chant of the cultists: *"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn,"* meaning "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming." The *Necronomicon* is cited again.

The last link in the chain of evidence is the tale of a sailor whose ship stopped at an unknown island. This is the subma-

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rine land of R'lyeh, raised by a seismic convulsion above the sea. When the crew land, they come upon the giant, tentacled Cthulhu himself, and only the sailor escapes to tell the tale.

Lovecraft assumed that a race of benign deities, the Elder Gods, once banished or restrained a hostile race of supernatural powers, the Great Old Ones or Ancient Ones. The Great Old Ones, however, strive to resume their dominion over the earth. Now and then foolhardy mortals tamper with the restraints laid upon the Old Ones, who thereupon begin terrifyingly to manifest themselves.

The Ancient Ones include Cthulhu, who sleeps in R'lyeh at the bottom of the sea; Shub Niggurath, the "Goat with a Thousand Young," a Lovecraftian version of Pan; Yog-Sothoth, coeval with space and time; and the daemon sultan Azathoth,

. . . who gnaws hungrily in inconceivable, unlighted chambers beyond time amidst the muffled, maddening beating of vile drums and the thin, monotonous whine of accursed flutes; to which detestable pounding and piping dance slowly, awkwardly, and absurdly the gigantic Ultimate Gods, the blind, voiceless, tenebrous, mindless Other Gods whose soul and messenger is the crawling chaos Nyarlathotep.[26]

That passage has always reminded me of one of the noisier night clubs. Lovecraft got the idea of making up his own pantheon from Dunsany. Other elements came from stories by Poe, Robert W. Chambers, and Ambrose Bierce. Most of the Cthulhu tales are laid in New England, "Arkham" being a thinly-disguised Salem and "Kingsport," Marblehead.

Lovecraft further created a set of pseudobiblia—imaginary books that, by familiarity, come to have a pseudo-life in the minds of readers. Lovecraft's fictive library includes the pre-human *Pnakotic Fragments*, the *Seven Cryptical Books of Hsan*, the "puzzling Eltdown shards," and, most portentous of all, the accursed *Necronomicon*. We are told that this fearful work was written about AD 730 by Abdul Alhazred, a mad Yamanite poet, and subsequently translated into Greek, Latin, and modern tongues. Abdul came to a bad end, being devoured in broad daylight by an invisible entity.

"The Call of Cthulhu" and its successors proved so popular that other writers for *Weird Tales* joined the game, writing pieces in the same setting and adding gods to its pantheon and books to its reference shelf. Thus Ausgus Derleth furnished the entity Lloigor and the book *Cultes des Goules*, by "The Comte d'Erlette"; Clark Ashton Smith, Tsathoggua and the *Liber Ivonis* or *Book of Eibon*. Lovecraft welcomed these additions and adopted some for his own stories.

Other writers, too, have tried their hands at Cthulhuvian tales, down to the present. Lovecraft wrote thirteen or more Cthulhu Mythos stories and left fragments of and notes for several more, which Derleth later completed. The total number of such stories, counting the imitations, must run into scores.

While often classed as fantasies, the Cthulhu stories bestride the borderline between fantasy and science fiction. For all the talk of "gods" and other supernatural beings, Lovecraft's attitude is wholly materialistic. These entities are merely beings of powers greater than those of men. They can traverse interstellar space and slip through forbidden dimensions, but they still are bound by natural law. They are no more concerned with human problems and morals than are men with the problems of mice; they have no more compunction about eliminating men who get in their way than men have about mice.

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In 1926, Lovecraft composed a novella (38,000 words) titled *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath.* In tone and atmosphere, this is like Lovecraft's early Dunsanian fantasies. It may, however, also be classed as a Cthulhuvian story, because the Elder Gods and the Ancient Ones appear in it.

The story follows Lovecraft's protagonist Randolph Carter on a journey through the world of dreams, looking for a wonderful city that he has glimpsed. He adventures among the zoogs, ghasts, ghouls, night-gaunts, and other sinister dwellers in dreamland. Night-gaunts are lean, rubbery, faceless flying creatures, which had haunted Lovecraft's childhood nightmares. At last Carter confronts one of the most fell of the Ancient Ones, Nyarlathotep. He falls back into the waking world and finds that his marvelous city is his own Boston.

Some do not like this eerie dream narrative, which was not published until after Lovecraft's death. He himself spoke of it as "pallid, second-hand Dunsanianism."[27] True, it lacks plot and characterization; but I am carried along by the author's sheer power of invention. It is a remarkable feat of sustained imagination, and it is Lovecraft's strongest claim to be a writer of heroic fantasy.

Settled again in Providence, the middle-aging Lovecraft took up his ghost writing, his weirds, and his voluminous letters as if he had never been away—with a few differences. While alone in Brooklyn, he had enjoyed a sightseeing trip to Washington. During his last decade, he became an enthusiastic tourist and traveled more or less yearly. His main objectives were historical sites and the remains of colonial architecture, of which he became a connoisseur. He also visited many friends and correspondents.

He usually set out by bus in spring. When he headed south, he stopped in New York to see "the gang." While he never really liked New York, he no longer much minded the place if he did not have to remain there. In fact, in later life he had a nostalgic memory of the good times he had enjoyed there while married.

From 1929 to 1935, he made two long trips through Virginia and the Carolinas to Florida; on the second trip he visited another fantasy writer, the Rev. Harry S. Whitehead. He made a journey through Tennessee and Mississippi to New Orleans. There he foregathered with Edgar Hoffmann Price, who wrote oriental weird tales. They talked around the clock. He joined a ten-dollar rail excursion to Montreal and Quebec; he returned exhausted but delighted by what he had seen, despite the hard things he had said about French Canadians. He also traveled around New England.

Sometimes he spoke of having drifted "back in my shell," but in fact he was more active and gregarious than ever. In his late years he was no more a recluse than are most writers who live neither in New York City nor in arty places like Taos or Carmel. According to people who knew him at this time, he no longer brooded over his "uselessness." As middle-aged men often do, he had come to terms with himself. Knowing what he could and could not do, he settled down to make the best of his talents and limitations.

His old xenophobia had been blunted by friendship with gifted Jews like Bloch and Kuttner. He never quite got over it completely, but he wrote less and less about ethnics, and his old venom seems to have dried up. If it be true that this attitude was partly inspired by his own feelings of inferiority, it may be more than a coincidence that the feelings of inferiority and the xenophobia faded away at about the same time.

Furthermore, his ultra-conservative political views had shifted leftward as a result

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of the Great Depression. He had become disillusioned with the upper class by knowing his aunts' conservative business-class friends, whom he found dull, stuffy, and unintellectual. His former tolerance of Fascism changed in the face of "the crazy scientific fallacies such as one sees in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia." Even more decisively, the dweller on the ground floor at 66 College Street was a high-school teacher of German who meant, when she was retired, to return to her native Germany to live. She went, but was soon back in Providence, where Lovecraft was appalled by her eyewitness accounts of Nazi persecution of Jews. He ended by approving Roosevelt's New Deal and preaching a kind of gradual, non-Marxist socialism.

He also shed most of his eighteenth-tury literary affectations. Hence his late poetry, notably the sonnet cycle *Fungi from Yuggoth,* is at least readable, if not up to the best work of Clark Ashton Smith and Robert E. Howard.

In 1932 his senior aunt, Mrs. Clark, died. He and Mrs. Gamwell moved into a smaller house at 66 College Street, behind the John Hay Library of Brown University. The house, of which they rented a five-room upstairs apartment for $40.00 a month, had been built in 1825 by Samuel B. Mumford. To make room for collegiate expansion, this building has since been moved to 65 Prospect Street, two blocks away.

During Lovecraft's last decade, the Lovecraft-*Weird Tales* circle took form. Lovecraft was the central figure by virtue of his tireless letter-writing and by the respect in which the others—most of whom never met him—held him. Around him orbited Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, Frank Belknap Long, and E. Hoffmann Price. Younger members included Catherine L. Moore, Henry Kuttner, August Derleth, Robert Bloch, and (in Lovecraft's last year) Fritz Leiber.

Lovecraft had nicknames for all, as he did for other correspondents. At first he Latinized their names, so that Long became "Belknapius." In the days of the Circle, Clark Ashton Smith was "Klarkash-Ton," converting his solidly Anglo-Saxon name to something out of forbidden dimensions; in "The Whisperer in Darkness," Lovecraft alludes to "the Atlantean high-priest Klarkash-Ton." Howard was "Two-Gun Bob"; Price, "Malik Taus" or "the Peacock Sultan"; Derleth, "Comte d'Erlette."

Lovecraft's letters were headed by such phrases as "Caverns of Yuggoth, Night of the Black Moon" and "Sealed Tower of Pnoth—Hour of the Brazen Gong." He often signed his letters with an Archaic "Yr. Most obt. Servt., HPLovecraft"; or again as "Grandpa Theobald." One of his affectations was to pretend to vast age; he began his letters to his surviving aunt with "My darling daughter."

Lovecraft has no high opinion of the Cthulhu Mythos tales. In 1931, he wrote of his own work:

It is excessively extravagant and melodramatic, and lacks depth and subtlety. My style is bad, toomfull of obvious rhetorical devices and hackneyed word and rhythm patterns. It comes a long way from the stark, objective simplicity which is my goal.

He sometimes burlesqued his own style. In 1934, he wrote that he could not write realistic fiction because he did not know enough about real people, and "the only 'heroes' I can write about are *phenomena* . . . It being settled that I'm a little man instead of a big man, I'd a damn sight prefer to let it go at that—& try to be a good little man in my narrow, limited

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imitative fashion—than to cover up & pretend to be a bigger man than I am."[28]

In 1931, Lovecraft composed a 37,000-word novella: "At the Mountains of Madness." An Antarctic expedition from Miskatonic University comes upon the colosal city of a race of the Ancient Ones, who resembled giant winged sea cucumbers standing on end. After most of the expedition perish, the narrator and one other survivor discover reliefs that give the history of the creatures. Coming from a distant star in the Mesozoic, they built the city with the help of gigantic ameboid servants called "shoggoths" in the *Necronomicon*. They died; but not all the shoggoths perished . . .

Wright rejected it; he wanted short stories, while Lovecraft found greater lengths more congenial. Three years later, Lovecraft composed "The Shadow out of Time (27,000 words) which Wright also turned down.

Lovecraft would not bother with the other science-fiction magazines, deeming them suitable only for mass-production hacks, whereas he wished to be considered a serious artist. In 1936, Donald Wandrei got the battered manuscripts of the two novellas, retyped them, and sent them to F. Orlin Tremaine, then editing *Astounding Stories*. Tremaine bought them and sent Lovecraft the biggest literary checks totaling $595.00, that he ever received.

In his late years, Lovecraft began to achieve recognition among connoisseurs of weird fiction outside the readers of *Weird Tales*. Several of his stories were reprinted in anthologies, and he conducted inconclusive correspondence with several book publishers about a possible book of Lovecraftian fiction.

In 1936, Lovecraft's health failed. In February, 1937, he entered a hospital, where on March 15 he died, aged forty-six, of a combination of Bright's disease and cancer of the intestine. Bloch wrote that, had he known of Lovecraft's condition, he would if need be have crawled on hands and knees to be at his bedside. Others among his friends and correspondents felt the same.

Mrs. Gamwell survived her nephew by four years. August Derleth, a younger member of the Circle living in Sauk City, Wisconsin, bought the publishing rights to Lovecraft's work. A prolific and versatile regional writer, Derleth has devoted much of his subsequent life to the promotion and publication of Lovecraft. With Donald Wandrei he formed Arkham House for this purpose. The first collection of Lovecraft's stories, *The Outsider and Others*, appeared in 1939 at $5.00, with a pre-publication offer of $3.50. Four years later, a second huge volume, *Beyond the Wall of Sleep*, came out. The two books sold slowly and at last went out of print. Then interest in Lovecraft arose, and so did the rare-book prices of these volumes. The last I heard, they were fetching $200.00 apiece.

Derleth continued publishing Lovecraftiana as well as collections of stories by Howard, Long, and other weirdists. A number of paperbacked reprints of Lovecraft's stories have appeared, and "The Dunwich Horror" has been made into a movie: not bad fun, but it should have been much better. Another is in production. As with many artists, Lovecraft's real success was posthumous.

Lovecraft wrote sixty-two professionally published stories. Considering that several are of novelette or novella length and that he worked hard all the while at his ghost writing, this is a modest but respectable output for twenty years of writing. His Dunsanian tales are a lasting addition to the genre of heroic fantasy. His writings were the mainstay of *Weird Tales* during its great days of the late twenties and early thirties, and the magazine furnished an

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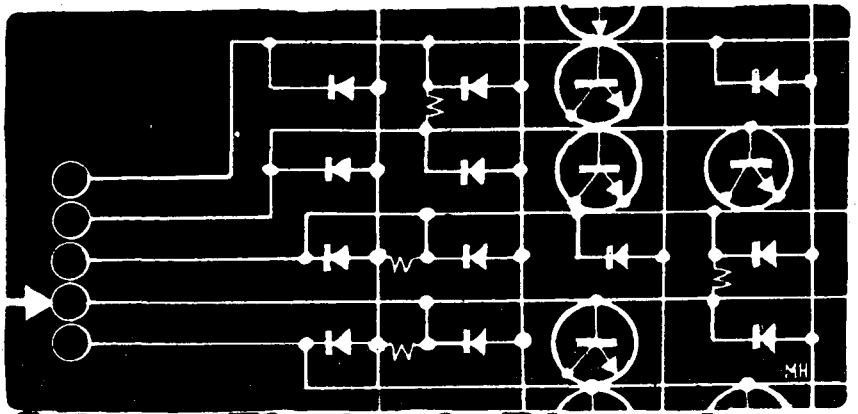

Science Fiction in Dimension

a critical column by ALEXEI PANSHIN

A NEW PARADIGM: II

In my last column, I suggested the need for a new paradigm by which to understand "sf," that substantial body of stories that we have been accumulating for the last forty-five years. The paradigm by which we formerly understood these stories is "science fiction." In its place I proposed a new paradigm, "speculative fantasy." Speculative fantasy is defined as a fictional form that uses removed worlds; characterized by distance and difference, as the setting for romantic-and-didactic narrative. I believe that this paradigm better suggests the nature of sf, its relationships to earlier and other literature, and its limits and purposes, and indicates a more useful and fruitful standard for its judgment.

There are three possible goals for a fictional narrative—the expression of truth (*mimesis*), the expression of idea (*didaxis*), and the expression of the esthetic (*romance*). Any story can pursue either one or a combination of these goals, with greatly varying possibilities of tone and effect. However, the goals of sf narrative can only be didactic or romantic, or more properly, some combination of these two. They must lie beyond the mimetic, beyond the limited range of the literal factual truth, in the kingdom of the unknown, the World Beyond the Hill.

In large part, this was suggested to me by a brilliant and provocative comment in a 1966 book that I recently encountered, *The Nature of Narrative* by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg:

"The whole idea of projecting a narrative into the future is a terribly daring one, and is one of the latest narrative possibilities to be discovered and exploited in Western literature. The journey in space, however fantastic, has a pedigree going back to Lucian at least; but the journey forward in time is really a development of the nineteenth century. The possibility has been there ever since the progressive concept of time evolved and the New Jerusalem was established as the future boundary of human existence, to go with the past boundary of the creation. But not until very recently has narrative literature

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been able to do much with this future. The great proliferation of science fiction narrative in our time is due to the opening of this virgin territory; and the scramble for its occupation has involved writers mainly concerned with fictional romance as well as those concerned with didactic fiction. At last these forms have found their true and natural territory."

This comment is neither perfect, nor in itself sufficient to explain sf, but it does fit neatly with an idea that we have been pursuing throughout this series of columns. This is the idea that sf employs distance and difference to produce an effect of psychological removal from the familiar factual world of common experience. Sf is removed from this world to what I have been calling the World Beyond the Hill.

What are the settings of sf? Any place beyond the range of knowledge.

Most obviously, the metaphorical worlds of time and space. The future—but not a real, singular, certain concrete future. Metaphorical futures, a multiplicity of pseudo-futures. A past accessible by means of the metaphor of time travel. A present in which anything can happen so long as it is kept out of the newspapers. Metaphorical space unlimited, the endless distance to the edge of the universe in which a billion planets that knowledge can never affect can exist and thrive.

Beyond these, sf can offer microscopic worlds, macroscopic worlds, parallel worlds, *ad hoc* worlds, heaven and hell. Worlds in which anything is possible. And even the most seemingly familiar of sf worlds, those that offer a "present" or a near future, are not mimetic. When they are left behind us, they can clearly be seen to be not our own world, but removed alternate universes. "The Man Who Sold the Moon" is not compromised by its differences from the actual facts of the first trip to the moon. "The Year of the Jackpot" promises that the sun went nova and destroyed the earth in 1954—and in the alternate universe offered by the story, that is what happened. The story is not spoiled.

Fredric Brown's novel, *What Mad Universe*, first published in 1948, is even constructed around this principle. It begins with a science fiction magazine editor in yet another 1954 in which an unmanned rocket is sent to explode a flare on the moon. It falls back and crashes on top of him instead and flips him into one of a myriad alternate universes—a strange inside out version of the world he knows, but completely real to its inhabitants. At the end of the story he is returned to a better version of his own familiar world. But neither the world he sets out from nor the world he returns to is our own, but only something like our own. It matters not what the "real" 1954 turned out to be. The story is beyond any reach of fact. The same is true of any sf story.

The quotation from Scholes and Kellogg indicates the point of this removal. The point is to provide a "true and natural territory" for romantic and didactic narative.

The diagram suggests the various possibilities for types of fiction. The shaded area represents those varieties of fiction that lie beyond the mimetic in the World Beyond the Hill.

To fix the meaning of the diagram, let me give examples of the kinds of fiction that fall into each area. Pure *mimetic* fiction is that kind that attempts to present life exactly as it is, altering nothing for the sake of a good story, altering nothing for the sake of a point. There isn't much pure mimetic fiction just as there is little purely didactic or purely romantic fiction. Fiction seems to derive much of its power from the very mixture of purpose. But pure mimetic fiction might be found in the autobiographical novel, or in a *roman à clef.*

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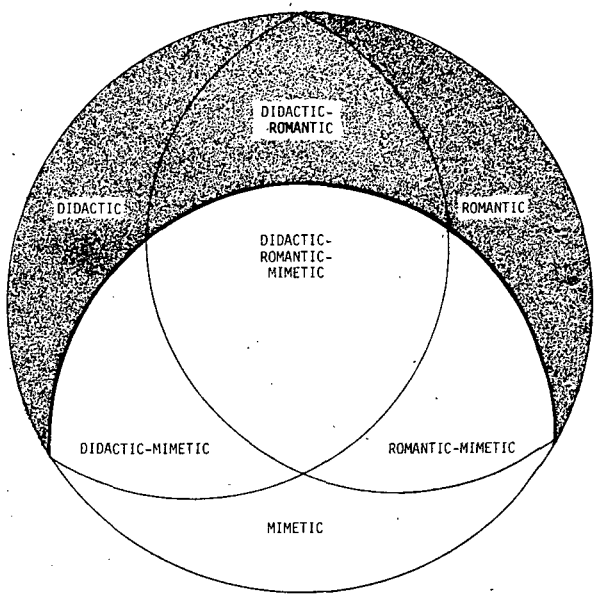

Romantic-mimetic fiction includes most of the light popular fiction published today. It presents life more or less as it is, as modified by storytelling considerations. The James Bond stories are romantic-mimetic fiction. So are *Airport, Valley of the Dolls,* and *The Adventurers.* So are most Western stories and historical novels.

Didactic-mimetic fiction includes most contemporary high literature, so-called "serious" fiction. It presents life as it is, modified by intellectual considerations. The *bildungsroman,* presenting the education in life of a young man, like Thomas Mann's first novel, *Buddenbrooks,* novels of contemporary satire and stories of socialist realism are all examples of didactic-mimetic fiction.

The final category of mimetic fiction, the story that contains all three purposes, could be said to include *Ulysses,* Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers,* Mary Renault's *The Bull from the Sea,* Shaw's *Saint Joan* and *Caesar and Cleopatra,* and even *West Side Story.*

But all of these examples of fiction have one thing in common. They all attempt to render some sort of justice, however perfunctory, to the world that was and the world that is. Our world is necessary to the existence of these stories. This is not true of our other three categories of fiction, those that belong to the World Beyond the Hill.

Pure *didactic* fiction strives to make points at all cost, yielding nothing to the impulse to please or the impulse to report what is. As with pure mimetic fiction, uncontaminated examples are hard to find. But examples might be Aesop's fables, More's *Utopia,* allegories like *The Pilgrim's Progress,* and speculations like Herman Kahn's.

And again, as pure, and nearly as rare, is *romantic* fiction, which presents us with the ultimate in pleasing story, fantasies unmodified by considerations of fact or

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idea. In this category would fall those didactic romances which time has robbed of point and modern imitations of them. Examples might be Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter* or Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros.*

What we are left with, finally, is the mixed category of *didactic-romantic* fiction: speculative fantasy. Sf.

Didactic-romantic fiction is a category with a long and distinguished history. It is one of the high forms of literature. Those who have worked in this area include all of the familiar names to be found in the standard histories of science fiction. Plato, with his romantic-didactic account of Atlantis in his dialogues, *Timaios* and *Kritias.* Lucian of Samosata's *True History.* Johannes Kepler, Cyrano de Bergerac, Jonathan Swift, Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. But these are not all by any means. They are only the examples with the greatest superficial resemblance to modern sf.

Didactic-romantic fiction also includes Greek tragedy. The purposes of Greek tragedy are not to mirror life, but artistic shaping and teaching. Aristophanes' *The Birds* with its setting in Cloudcuckooland and its didactic purpose is also speculative fantasy.

The medieval romances that shaped the ideals of Europe for two hundred years, the *Tristran* of Gottfried van Strassburg and the *Parzival* of Wolfram von Eschenbach, are speculative fantasy set in an unhistorical, ungeographical analogue of Europe—not the world the readers of *Tristran* and *Parzival* knew, but a parallel universe.

Much of Shakespeare is speculative fantasy. Not the historical chronicle plays, of course, but all of the plays, tragedy and comedy, that are placed in removed unrealistic settings. Seacoast Bohemia, a mist-shrouded moor, the Forest of Arden, Prospero's island. And Shakespeare's purposes are didactic and romantic—not to show life as his spectators familiarly knew it.

Even Milton's *Paradise Lost* must be counted as one of sf's antecedents. It is romantic and didactic and not at all mimetic.

In fact, it can be said that until modern times—the last two hundred and fifty years—almost all serious literature was didactic and romantic, but not mimemtic. The reason can be found in a remark in Aristotle's *Poetics* commenting on the Greek tragedy of a hundred years previous:

"It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen,—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with metre no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular."

Serious literature was always more interested in expressing universal cases than in expressing the particularities, fleeting and ephemeral, of any single time and place. Fact was not its end. Fact was a permissable means of evoking a sense of verisimilitude, a necessary plausibility, but it was not the purpose of serious literature. Serious literature was intended for superior literate people. To them, the lives of common people were irrelevant and they were already familiar with the facts of their own lives.

In his book *The Anatomy of Satire*, Gilbert Highet speaks to the point of the uses of fact in speculative fantasy:

"However, there are many famous pieces of fiction which are accepted as being wholly or mainly satirical, and are not parodies at all. One of the most famous

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is Swift's *Gulliver's Travels.* This is not a parody. It is a close imitation of contemporary tales of travel and exploration; but it does not, either in manner or in intention, imply that such tales are ridiculous, and that neither it nor they are worthy of belief. Some storytellers do this—for instance, Lucian in his *True History*—but Swift does not. On the contrary, he tries very hard to make the book seem authentic, by inserting intelligible and credible details which a real voyager would record (weather, ship's course, latitude, longitude, etc.), by adding maps, by transcribing at least one passage verbatim from a genuine sailor's log, and by placing his imaginary countries in little-known parts of the world, where there is, so to speak, room for them. Thus, Lilliput is out in the Indian Ocean, south-west of Sumatra. The land of the Houyhnhnms is in the same region, within sailing distance of Australia, whose original inhabitants were so primitive as to resemble Yahoos. Laputa, which has an Oriental feel about it, is in the Pacific Ocean toward Japan. Brobdingnag is in the north-eastern Pacific: with uncommon serendipity Swift located it somewhere between the Kodiak islands, where the enormous bears live, and the area of Oregon and northern California, where the magnificent sequoias make us all feel as Gulliver did among the giants."

Around the year 1700, serious fiction began to migrate out of the romantic-didactic World Beyond the Hill and into the familiar world of the mimetic. The reasons were three. One is indicated by Highet in this quotation. The exploration of the world left no blank areas in which a Brobdingnag or a Laputa could exist. Earth could no longer support the World Beyond the Hill. A second reason is the spread of literacy throughout the population. The audience for fiction suddenly became far broader and more diverse than it had ever been before—and that audience was interested in discovering itself and the full range of possibilities inherent in this world of fact. The times were awakening from a dream to discover a malleable world in which almost anything seemed possible. And the third reason is that at the same time that ships were discovering and mapping the world and the new middle class was discovering itself, literature discovered for the first time the fictional uses of the particular. The result was the rise of the mimetic novel, a new form discovering new possibility. It has only been in these last two hundred and fifty years that serious fiction has concerned itself with the mimetic world. The result has been an understandable overconcentration.

But now the day of the mimetic novel as the exclusive vehicle of serious fiction is over. We have explored the earth and turned it into a Global Village. We have discovered that not all problems worth acknowledging have social causes, and not all social problems are amenable to present solution. Idea and art have as great a claim to serious fictional consideration as fact has.

But in order for didactic-romantic fiction to exist again, it has been necessary to develop new locales for it, new "true and natural territory." And this is what science fiction has been doing since 1926. It has been postulating new worlds and developing a vocabulary with which to speak of them.

The main vehicle of serious literature is still the secular novel. But its best understanding of the world is an impassioned bleat of frustration. The reason is that the novel has been asked to do what it cannot naturally do—to speak of the universal beyond the particular. The very particularities of the novel are its limitation. The mimetic cannot stretch far enough to encompass all the stories and ideas that the mind can conceive.

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Speculative fantasy combines the didactic and the romantic. The emphasis may be on either. Balance is no requirement. There are sf stories that are in emphasis allegories, like R. A. Lafferty's *Fourth Mansions* or in emphasis romance, like Edmond Hamilton's *Star Wolf* stories. In an earlier column, I described the facts of sf as a collection of daydreams, nightmares, adventures, romances, satires, extrapolations, displacements, allegories, parables, speculations, games, polemics, visions, fables and myths. All of these possibilities and more are inherent in the combination of the romantic and the didactic. What they will become in their true and natural territory now that it has been discovered is something that no one can yet know, but they should thrive there.

Speculative fantasy is a fictional form that uses removed worlds, characterized by distance and difference, as the setting for romantic-and-didactic narrative. It is not to be judged by any special and limited standard, but by the standard of its ancestors, the best and highest literature that Western man has produced. By that standard, all but a bare handful of sf stories are failures. But it will not always be so.

Science fiction has established the base on which speculative fantasy will be built. That is a basis for pride. And speculative fantasy in 1971 has more potential to discover than the mimetic novel had in 1700.

Up jets—open skies.

—Alexei Panshin

(Continued from page 108)

outlet for writers of heroic fantasy when no other steady American market existed.

As he himself not only admitted but even exaggerated, Lovecraft suffered from serious literary faults. Too many of his tales read at once tire the reader by repetition of atmospheric tricks and the sameness of many plots. The stories are overloaded with adjectival rhetoric; one does not shudder merely because one has been repeatedly told that something is "horrible," "ghastly," or "blasphemous." Critics have had particular fun with Lovecraft's favorite adjective "eldritch."

On the other hand, Lovecraft had a powerful imagination, turned out much good, solid entertainment, and exercised wide influence. In the small puddle of weird fantasy, he was a big frog indeed. If some idolaters have over-praised him, some detractors have unjustly derogated him. Whether he was a "genius" is a matter of definition; but, whatever his model Poe had, Lovecraft had a goodly share of the same stuff.

NOTES

17. Sonia H. Davis: "H. P. Lovecraft as his Wife Remembers Him," in *Books at Brown* (Feb. 1949), p. 11.
18. Lovecraft (1968), p. 115; (1965), p. 332.
19. Lovecraft (1965), pp. 339f.
20. Davis, p. 10.
21. *Ibid., loc cit.*
22. Lovecraft (1965), p. 51; (1968), pp. 47, 113; several unpub. letters to J. V. Shea, 1933.
23. Lovecraft (1939), p. 92; Davis, p. 11.
24. Davis, pp. 12f.
25. Lovecraft, *op. cit.*, pp. 234, 241.
26. Lovecraft (1943), p. 77.
27. Unpub. letter to J. V. Shea, 21 Aug. 1931.
28. Unpub. letter to E. H. Price, 15 Aug. 1934.

—L. Sprague deCamp

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(Continued from page 4)
sibly a major war of some sort, and most likely one in which none of the rules for "civilized" war are observed. It's a good bet that bacteriological warfare is already in the advanced testing stages, for instance.

Well, that's only *one* potential for disaster, and look how it multiplies into dozens of ramifications! It may well be that the time has come for the human race to pare itself down to once-more manageable proportions—and in a single series of convulsions. I see no way to hold up my hand and declame, "Stop!" with any chance of success.

But if by "what are you doing about it," you are asking, *what am I doing to survive it?* my answer would be rather different.

Ideally, I should isolate myself from the mainstream of humanity and survive as a totally self-sufficient entity (or family unit). This is not impossible—even today. Sylvan Hart has done it, and has lived a life of almost total self-sufficiency in the wilds of Idaho for more than thirty years.

But I'm unwilling to make a step so total—probably because of my selfish desire to take advantage of technological civilization. (I should hate to give up my vast record collection, for instance—the music contained therein is a large part of my life.)

I might also buy a farm in a secluded area and begin building up an arsenal of guns and ammunition—against that day when looters and roving bands of marauders might stalk the land. I haven't—yet. Mostly because it would take more money than I care to put in that direction at present. (But a really rural farm would be nice, just in itself, and I expect we'll end up on one eventually—if we have the chance to last that long. And I've handled and used guns enough to know some pleasure in their intrinsic esetics, so that a collection for the more mundane purpose of owning good guns is not impossible—unless laws are passed against it.)

But it seems to me that one area in which I can arm myself, here and now, is in knowledge—survival knowledge.

Years ago, I read George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* with growing irritation. In it, the protagonist (who, along with scattered handfuls of people, escaped a death-dealing plague) has all of the greater San Francisco area in which to live, along with a dozen or so other survivers. This offers him fantastic opportunities for looting—everything there is in the Bay Area is his for the taking, should he desire it. But he muffs it. When the tires grow old and wear out, he stops driving his jeep. (He could have driven on the rims, or stuffed the tires with straw, or made do with half a dozen other expedients.) He gives up on just about everything else he tries or initiates, and by the time he is an old man his children's children are Noble Savages with no vestiges of civilization (language, literature, etc.) remaining.

It's an annoying tract, despite the high quality of Stewart's writing, because he has set up such an obvious straw man, to prove such a dubious point—that modern man can't survive on his wits without totally giving up all aspects of civilization. That's nonsense.

After I read the book, I began thinking of all the ways in which I could have overcome the protagonist's problems—by myself, with no added skills or abilities and little recourse to references for added knowledge. (Stewart's protagonist had libraries and universities accessible when he desired them.) I realized that although I knew enough to make a better job of it, I didn't know enough.

Since then I have taught myself carpentry, auto mechanics, and a host of related mechanical skills (I was already good at business-machine repair). And I intend to go on learning more ways to

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survive in a self-relient mode. If chaos never arrives, I shall have already earned dividends—in the bills I haven't had to pay to plumbers, carpenters, mechanics and servicemen. (In my family the motto was always, "Don't throw it out if it can be fixed or there's still some use left in it." But then, my family's of canny Yankee stock.)

Most recently, since returning to Virginia and a semi-suburban, semi-rural area, my wife and I have been looking into foraging.

Foraging has immediate practical value—fresh food which one has expended no time on growing—and considerable survival value. There was a time when most people knew about the "edible weeds" which grew in their vacinity, but in the last fifty years much of this home-knowledge has been lost. People have lost contact with the land as they've become increasing urbanized, for example—a southern Negro with a one-mule farm probably knows all the local foragings there are, but when he moves to New York or Chicago or Detroit, what good does it do him?—and as families move from one state to another, they lose contact with local lore and generate no fresh knowledge of the land with which to replace it. Even the Indians, shivied onto distantly located reservations and then raised to consider the white world's ignorant values superior, have lost much of their lore of the land.

Books are being written to keep this knowledge alive, however, and are easily accessible. Kenneth Angier's *How To Survive in the Woods* is a classic. More recently Euell Gibbons has published several books on foraging, the most famous of which is *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*. (Gibbons also writes a regular column for *Organic Gardening* magazine—nothing is more "organic" than a plant grown in the wilderness.)

A few days ago, my wife and I sat down to make a list of all the wild "weeds" we had found and eaten. It ended up with almost thirty items, and we've by no means exhausted the area.

Not all these "wild dishes" tasted that wonderful to me. The wild carrots, for instance, seemed bitter despite the seasonings we tried, and day lily tubers seemed more work to prepare than they were worth. On the other hand, bamboo shoots (bamboo grows wild in this area—or, more likely, runs wild) are delicious and cooked lamb's quarters (or pigweed) are a gourmet's version of spinach. Some of our foragings have been for such esoteric arcane items as wild rose hips (very high in natural vitamin C), but we've also foraged chickweed (a weed every gardener pulls out and throws away by the bushel), violet greens (violets grow everywhere around here), dandelion crowns, roots, greens and buds (the crowns, greens and buds can all be cooked into pungent dishes; the roots make an excellent coffee substitute) and wild onions.

Gibbons' books have been bibles for us in our foraging, but there are other references we should explore. It would appear that nearly all the ground-plants we call "weeds" have some food value save those which are poisonous. (It's worth knowing those, too.)

Naturally, not all this knowledge with which we are equipping ourselves will be of value, when chaos comes. Much will depend upon the nature of the chaos—a nuclear war (still not to be ruled out) would probably render me and my knowledge obsolete in one fancy flash. (I recently read a local article on the extent to which damage from an H-bomb exploded over Washington, D.C., would reach. I'm afraid that here we would be instantly atomized—and even where my parents live, back in the mountains of western Virginia, survival would be chancy. Under the cir-

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cumstances, "Civil Defense," bomb shelters and all the rest are so much silly-goose nonsense.)

On the other hand, a breakdown in services, followed by domestic riots, might give us a chance, and George R. Stewart's plague, if we survived it (quarantine still works pretty well), would leave us sitting pretty.

But of course, in the back of my mind I don't believe it will happen. The back of my mind is stubbornly, unfailingly, irresponsibly optimistic. And it says, "Just go on writing science fiction and live on your royalties in your old age."

Last year, Jay and Alice Haldeman decided to begin a small, unpretentious writer's conference based more or less on the original premises of the Milford Writer's Conference.

The Haldemans live in Baltimore, in a section known as Guilford—a respectable part of town, by the way. It was inevitable that their conference would be dubbed the Guilford Writer's Conference.

I was invited to and attended the second and third conferences, held this year in January and March. Long weekends of intensive reading and criticizing were the main order of business: each attendee put in two stories (or, on occasion, more), and these stories were discussed Saturday and Sunday afternoons, following a fairly rigid set of rules by which each attendee was allowed to give his criticisms without interruption and the author under fire could answer back only after hearing out all his critics in silence.

Necessarily, the number of attendees was low. At the second conference (my first), they were Joe Haldeman, his brother Jay, Gardner Dozois, George Alec Effinger ("Piglet," to his friends), Jack Dann, a local fan whose work was embarrassing, and myself. At the third conference, Effinger was unable to make it and the local fan was absent.

A polarity of taste soon manifested itself. Joe Haldeman and I found ourselves the "old wavers" of the group, more preoccupied with strong writing, good storytelling, and most of those other outmoded virtues. (Joe consistantly impressed me with his work—and I wish he wasn't *quite* so successful that he's already priced himself outside my reach.) Gardner Dozois and Jack Dann, on the other hand, formed the basis for the "new wave" axis: their prose often a thicket of near impenetrability, their ambitions too Literary by half, for my taste. And, caught somewhere in the middle, Jay Haldeman and Piglet, the former just beginning to create for himself a viable professional style, the latter already shedding great sparks of raw talent.

As the conferences progressed, talk grew about a "Guilford issue" of one of my magazines—a showcase for young talent. The goal was not impossible—I'd already seen and liked and bought or made offers for the work of several participants. I had only weeks earlier purchased Jay's first story from the conference—his first sale. And I had two new, excellent stories by Piglet and Jack Dann had a short story at the conference which I liked and he promised to get back from another editor who presently had a copy of it.

Unfortunately, nothing I'd then read by Gardner impressed me sufficiently—and he had ready-trained better-paying markets (*Orbit, Quark!*) waiting for his best work anyway. And Joe was working on a novel.

At the third conference the group as a whole discussed a story of Gardner's which I had under submission—and was dissatisfied with. We finally hammered out a compromise, a reworking of it which probably didn't wholly please any of us, but constituted an improvement for most of us.

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The result will be on view in these pages next issue: accompanying the conclusion of John Brunner's "The Dramaturges of Yan," will be a special "Guilford Conference Writers' Issue" which will include the following stories:

"Cartoon" by Jack M. Dann

"The Awesome Menace of The Polarizer" by Geo. Alec Effinger

"Garden of Eden" by Jack C. Haldeman II

"Wires" by Gardner Dozois

and "Things are Tough All Over" by Ted White.

It promises to be an exciting issue. Look for it.

—Ted White

(Continued from page 76)

great and lesser toes was so large that its feet appeared prehensile. The second baby looked all right until they saw how very crossed its eyes were. The third was a mongoloid. The salesman pointed to it. "This one is priced to go, only twenty-five dollars."

Both Biens looked appalled.

"The others are two hundred apiece."

"Are these all you have?" Eliot asked.

"At the moment."

As they returned to the front room Jeanie asked what they did with the babies if no one wanted them.

"If they remain unpurchased for more than six months we dissolve them back into the nutrient solution. Conservation."

"Oh."

"Sorry we couldn't help you. Perhaps some other time."

"Perhaps," Eliot repeated and they walked out onto the street.

Jeanie frowned and stared at the pavement as she walked. Eliot took her arm. "Don't worry, everything will be all right," he said.

She started to cry.

"Don't." He took her hand to his lips and kissed her fingers. Then he leant over to kiss her cheek. They descended the steps to the subway. As they entered the station they heard a loud grunting and a scream.

"Oh, Eliot, look!"

The Subway Boar, huge and hairy and black; silver-tusked and pointy-eared, had cornered a terrified woman in an alcove. As they watched, it lowered its tusks and went in for the kill. Just before it got to her the woman desperately heaved something at it. The bundle missed and landed behind the Boar, almost outside the alcove. It started immediately to shriek. "That's a *baby*," Jeanie cried.

"Wait here," Eliot ordered, running toward the Boar. Heedlessly, Jeanie hurried after him. They snatched up the infant and ran before the beast noticed them. Jeanie looked sorrowfully back at the woman. "There's nothing we can do for her," Elliot said: snorting and growling the Boar was devouring its victim.

"What are you doing to the baby?" Eliot asked as they got on the train.

"It's a boy," Jeanie answered, rearranging its clothing.

—Laurence Littenberg

ON SALE NOW IN SEPTEMBER AMAZING
The conclusion of
ROBERT SILVERBURG'S
most daring new novel
THE SECOND TRIP

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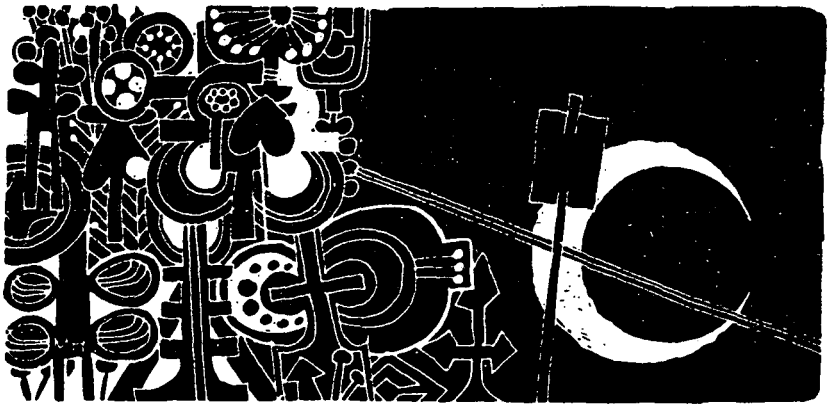

...ACCORDING TO YOU

Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet of paper, and addressed to: According To You, *P.O. Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046*

Dear Ted,

I don't think you've played fair with us, Ted, for the first time since you've taken over the magazines. I can understand your reasons, but I don't like it.

I refer, of course, to the ending of your otherwise excellent story in the latest, April 1971, FANTASTIC. "Wolf Quest" is a most engrossing and interesting tale, parallelling but remaining distinct from the early section of *Phoenix Prime*. Particularly if one has read that, this story of son following father is especially interesting. And the fact that the work is incomplete as printed is not itself in question: had the story merely, as you say in the introduction, been incomplete in that it 'does not resolve the questions posed for its young protagonist," I wouldn't have complained at all. But when you mean "not resolving the questions" as cutting things off with a real "Lady or the Tiger" ending, this become more than a bit annoying. Knowing publishing schedules, there's little way of telling when I'll be able to get hold of the book itself, or, considering present distribution, whether I'll *ever* see a copy of the completed work. I really do feel you're taking advantage of the reader here, in cutting off the story at the point it is now.

At any rate, with this minor quibble aside, I'm quite favorably impressed with the April FANTASTIC, from the cover onward. And I think this particular cover goes a long way to make the point I was trying to make in the lettercolumn here. It really isn't so much the particular cover art used, but the *way* in which this art is presented. The October cover I didn't like featured a Morrow painting of a muscled swordsman, standing over a scantily-clad heroine type. This month's cover features a muscled archer, standing over a pile of slain foes. The physical stance in both is the same, the costume about the same, even the hair being blown in the back is almost identical. Yet the current cover, without handlettering, with the entire logo on a solid field over the rest of the cover,

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and the artwork and lettering nicely separated and presented, is far more interesting to look at than that earlier one. *And* it looks a lot less pulpish, in the bad sense of the word, than did that other cover.

So far, I've had time to read (of the fiction) only your story and Alexi Panshin's delightful little short. But friends have read the Brunner, and have already spoken of it as a possible hugo nominee for next year. So with at least three notable stories in a single issue, you have an eviable record here, one of your best in some time.

Your answers, Ted, to Todd Compton's letter are excellent as far as they go, but mainly for want of space, are quite incomplete in answering many of his specific objections. In the first place, his call for the use of the more "exciting" writers in the prozines in general, and the ultimate's in particular. O.K. Todd lists the novels of "Lafferty, Joanna Russ, Delany, Panshin, Zelazny" as the writing he finds most exciting in the field—and I think I, and many other people, would have to agree with him. He also mentions that these have been absent from both A/F and the other prozines, and he seems to consider this due to lack of effort on the part of the editors. Not very likely, Todd. Let's look at the writers specifically—but first note that all have had award-winners, Ace Specials, or both very recently. These are some of the most sought after authors in the field, and can get much more money in selling novels to the paperbacks—or sometimes even the hardcovers—than to the magazines. They can simply command more than any of the magazines, all of which are in some sort of financial trouble, can possibly afford to pay. In addition, most write relatively little; as with most good writers, they take more time over each piece of fiction. Thus there is simply less to go around, and again, the highest bidder is able to corner the market. So Damon Knight can afford to pay a little more for *Orbit* than any of the magazines except *Analog,* and thus gets the stories.

But I was going to be specific in terms of authors. All right, Lafferty. A very individual taste, you must admit; only written (or published, at least) four novels all told. Last two quickly sold to Ace specials. And his short stories *have* appeared in all the magazines—including the December FANTASTIC.. Russ? Only two novels, both Ace Specials, and a few short stories. One of her novel's opening sections was in F&SF some issues back. But again, like Lafferty, a very individualistic writer; can a magazine afford to spend the time and money to get a name writer with such a relatively limited audience? (Ted?) Delany? We all know how long he takes on each finely crafted story—and he's one of the few who rates first publication in hardcover. No magazine can possibly compete for his occasional gem! Panshin? One general interest novel, the Villars novels, a few short stories. One short-short here in this issue of FANTASTIC; I doubt very much if the Villars stories would go over well with the average buyer of any of the prozines. Zelazny? Same sort of thing; if he can get hardcover publication, why give it to a magazine for far less money.

Moreover, the A/F mags have seemed to do quite well in recent months getting some of the better fiction in the field. A Silverberg novel, and Bob's work in the last five years has been some of the brightest in the field, Hugo winner and nominee. The Dick novel, and while this one wasn't especially outstanding, Dick is one of the most underrated writers in the field; he too is a Hugo winner and nominee. The New LeGuin novel—and Mrs. LeGuin is the hotest writer around, having taken both Hugo and Nebula, with additional nominees for other works. Two Brunner novellas, yet another current star, Hugo

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winner and nominee. Sure, this is just the best and best known material—but I think we've been lucky to see this much. I'm sure any of the writers could have sold these stories for something over and above what A/F has been able to pay, but Ted's managed to get them here. I'd say—not bad, not bad at all.

Jerry Lapidus
54 Clearview Drive
Pittsford, N.Y., 14534

I'm sorry you don't feel I "played fair" with you, Jerry, so I tell you what I'll do: if Lancer is willing to hold back the scheduling of Quest of the Wolf, *I'll run the remainder of the book (tentatively titled "Winged Quest") here. But it won't be before January, 1972—and not at all if Lancer won't go along with it. As for your answers to Todd Compton, you are accurate in some respects and less so in others. The sale of magazine (or "serial") rights on a novel in no way jeopardizes a hardcover book sale, and we have in the past published novels (like* Emphyrio *by Jack Vance) which later were published in hardbound. However, the decision of where a novel will be submitted is a chancy one—sometimes dependant upon an agent, sometimes depending on the contractual terms of the book publication—and I would guess that somewhere less than 25% of all science fiction novels are even offered for magazine serialization . . . to us, or to anyone else. Of the names you and Todd listed, for example, I've never been offered a Lafferty, Russ, Delany or Panshin novel—although a portion of Delany's Nova was published by* AMAZING STORIES *before I became its editor. I did see Zelazny's* Nine Princes in Amber, *but his agent and our publisher could not get together on terms. I spoke to Joanna Russ after she was forced to cut her* And Chaos Died *in half for publication in F&SF, and reminded her that she had, in the end, received no more money for its appearance there and suffered much mental anguish in the cutting—you may (he said, hopefully) be seeing the next Russ novel here. And Alexei Panshin has told me he intends to offer me his next novel—although which of three he's presently working on, I don't know. (They include an Ace Special, the next Villiers book, and the first volume of an epic fantasy trilogy. The latter is pretty well earmarked for publication here in* FANTASTIC.*) In all, then, I think we've not done badly—and have a good deal to offer you in future issues. Following the conclusion of John Brunner's novel, for instance, will be a new Elric novella by Michael Moorcock. And after that, quite possibly, "Winged Quest."—TW*

Dear Ted:

Hello again. I won't go into the myriad boring details of why I haven't written in some months—the fact that the distributor around here seems to have given up on AMAZING *and* FANTASTIC is one; I found a rather bedraggled copy of the April issue last night, so here I am. These days one doesn't expect to find peace and a breath of back-garden on the morning after a steady rain in the pages of an SF magazine, so it is doubly comforting to find them both in your editorial; thank you. I am constantly amazed by the degree to which the SF-mentality blends with Victorian furniture and homemade bread, but the fact that it does is perhaps the strongest point it has going for it. The perception of the good things in the past coupled with the vision to adjust to the future is the only road to sanity in our sort of a present. But enough amature philosophizing.

Some comments on Todd Compton's letter: he certainly does have some good ideas. But I do believe the result of their implementation would be a bit of good SF with a lot of pretentious hype. The reason is that there just isn't that much good

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SF-related material available. Case in point: the Paul Kantner-*Jefferson Starship* album. It happens to be one of my favorite records, but not because it is a tour-de-force, revolutionary expansion of the bridge between SF and rock. It isn't, and any "intelligent" rock review column would have to pan it: as far as the question of avante-gardish musical experimentation goes, the album is decidedly mediocre. *But that isn't why people love that record!* For those of us who grew up wanting nothing more than a chance to stowaway on the first ship to Mars, that record is one hell of a lot of *fun!* That's why people buy it; that's where it succeeds where Frank Zappa fails. And a *New Worlds*-type of magazine can't get away with that sort of recommendation; those who know rock would put them down for defending it; those who like the album would put them down for failing to see where it belongs if they knocked it. Result: very few readers. Oh well.

I recently (finally) got around to reading *Heinlein in Dimension,* and found it very interesting. I would love to read Panshin's opinions and analysis of *I Will Fear No Evil;* has he reviewed it anywhere? And if he hasn't, is there a possibility of his doing so in Amazing or Fantastic? It would be much more available to the various people who have read the book in one of your publications than in a fanzine (I bought mine in a small mainstream bookstore that hardly stocks SF at all, and I suspect there are readers of *Stranger in a Strange Land* et al. who don't buy fanzines but perhaps do read A & F.)

Along the same lines, I am looking forward to L. Sprague deCamp's articles with glee! Here's hoping I can find an issue of FANTASTIC on time for a change!

I thought Cy Chauvin's comments on "Battered Like a Brass Bippy" were well taken; I had read "Glass Goblin" twice and still missed a few points the first time through. If I ever get the continuing adventures of Rightor Wong and her Wonder Dog Lymph put together, stand back! Huevo Omlette Strikes Again!

Oh, boy, did I like "The Eight-thirty to Nine Slot"! *That's* what I call a story. Is Effinger writing a novel yet? (If you tell me he has sold one to the Ace Specials, I'll start believing in conspiracies again!) I am also fond of Steve Harper's drawing for that story; it's different from what one usually sees in sf zines. More please! (And I loved his cover last issue (Feb.). It is certainly refreshing to see a little subtle color on an sf cover, rather than the constant primaries we are usually bombarded with. I am curious—could that picture have been influenced by Ursula Le Guin's *Tombs of Atuan*? It reminded me of that right off. Maybe I'm just strange. . . .)

Well, enough of this. I expect you'll hear from me next issue. Peace.

Paula Marmor
8339 Pierce Dr.
Buena Park, CA 90620

The interest of west coast rock musicians in sf is well-known, but I can't really say they've done anything which has excited me from a science-fictional point of view. On the other hand, the Firesign Theatre's third album, Don't Crush That Dwarf . . . *is a definitely science fiction, and as adroitly done as, say, Philip K. Dick's* The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch. *It's up for a Hugo this year in the drama category, and deserves one. I might add that as long as we're discussing rock music and sf, that King Crimson's three albums (and the off-shoot album,* MacDonald and Giles *are very heavy mythic-fantasy trips, the third album,* Lizard, *especially. The cover illuminations on that one alone are enough to throw one into a reverie on dragons, lizards, unicorns, and the whole Tolkein Middle Earth scene. The music reinforces it. As for a Panshin review of*

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Heinlein's "I will Fear No Evil," he published it in a recent issue of Science Fiction Review, *and, good as it was, I don't intend reprinting it here. And, finally, George Effinger* has *been doing free-lance reading for the Ace Specials line, and I regard it as only a matter of time before he does one himself . . .—TW*

Dear Ted: I was disappointed to find the old logo on the April issue, but far more disappointed to find a Gray Morrow cover. It was hideous. Get some Hinge covers. *These* kind of covers, those that catch the eye and are interesting, off-beat, and intriguing, gain new customers—not cheap pulp art. You won't believe me (or Sol Cohen, who makes most of the decisions, won't), but I'll wager that your November AMAZING sold better than any of the three previous ones.

"Wolf Quest" was good, but ending the story in the air is a little sneaky. I have no objection to that kind of ending as a rule, but this seems like a blatant attempt to make readers buy *Quest of the Wolf* just so they can see how the story turns out. Seems a little underhanded to me.

All the stories were good (Effinger's was nothing short of brilliant), and so were most of the illos—again, Jones' look unfinished and sloppy.

The June issue was very good; everything about it was excellent except for the story "No Exit," which, though well-written, was obvious.

Your new logo is an improvement, but still not representative of that sense of wonder that shows up on the inside of your magazines.

I expect to see still more improvements in the magazines in the near future. You're doing a great job; don't knuckle under to the voices of authority—make the magazine what *you* want it to be.

Scott Edelstein
1917 Lyttonsville Rd.
Silver Spring, Md., 20910

Ah, but what if that's not the magazine you *want, Scott?—TW*

Ted White:

You ask for comments on your new logo. Well, it certainly has a more modern appearance than your old one, although I must admit that FANTASTIC's old logo was never the eyesore that AMAZING's was. But I was expecting your new logo to be somewhat different—had you thought about one with a more gothic/handlettered appearance? Similar, perhaps, to the "Always the Black Knight" headline on last June's issue? I would think that might fit FANTASTIC's image as a predominately fantasy magazine better.

Dan Adkins is a more competent artist than some of those you have featured recently; technically, I would say his cover painting is good. But on the other hand, it isn't very original; I'd swear that I've seen something like it on one of your reprint titles. Bright, neon type colors would also make a difference; and besides being more pleasing to the eye, they might also stand out on a newsstand better.

I could complain that Poul Anderson's novel "The Byworlder" is sort of out of place in a *fantasy* magazine, but it is so good! It's the first of what I would call really "major" novels published in FANTASTIC in a long time, and if the second part lives up to the promise of the first, I bet you'll see it nominated for a Hugo. The biggest fault in it is Poul Anderson's tendancy to have his characters "lecture," rather than reveal the story's background a bit more carefully and naturally. Like one of Anderson's own characters says (on pg. 38), "This is no time for lectures." But I can't hold this against Anderson—the rest of the novel is just too interesting.

When I look through your back issues, it seems like your short stories have suffered most from your page-cut. This wouldn't be so bad, if it weren't for the

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fact that most of your stories seem just so-so . . . (But at least they aren't the kind of tripe that *Galaxy* seems to be serving up these days.) "No Exit" is a very slight story. "War of the Doom Zombies" is even crazier than Ova Hamlet's previous stories, though this time the story was more of an outright farce than a satire. Richard Peck made his debut in the Sept.-Oct. *If* with "The Guardians", not here in FANTASTIC. But I agree that he is at least a promising writer, although neither "The Man Who Faded Away" or the *If* story lives up to his potential. "The Lurker in the Locked Bedroom" by Ed Bryant is a humorous, delightful little fantasy. But like I said before, none of the short stories make an impression on me, unlike those in your previous issues.

I wish you could eliminate your reprint, or at least reprint something worthwhile in it. How about a *real* classic for once, like Henry Hasse's "He Who Shrank" or A. Merritt's "The Moon Pool"? Arnie Katz should dig a little deeper in those piles of mouldering magazines! If you could find some good reprints, they would complement your new material nicer, since the writers in the '30s and '40s generally had a different approach than those working in the field today.

I don't know why Alexi Panshin is still harping about his "creative fantasy" bit; you'd think he'd have it out of his system by now. I don't doubt that there is some truth in what he says, but there's no need for him to become obsessed with it like John J. Pierce became obsessed with his "New Wave" battle. Panshin also isn't very logical; apparently to refute one person's statement that "you can write anything that you care to write and find a market for it, "Panshin mentions that that very same person rejected one of his stories because it was "unacceptable as science fiction." But just because *one* editor rejects a story for that reason doesn't mean that there isn't a market for the story, does it? To be honest, I think Panshin wants to change human nature—for whether you call it science fiction or "creative fantasy" won't editors have a right to reject a story that they think isn't SF or "creative fantasy"? To see Panshin waste his enormous talents writing this column is saddening; for if the column is supposed to be "literary criticism" it is the absolute worse pap I have seen, and I wish you would replace it with something else.

In contrast, L. Sprague de Camp's "Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers" is simply marvelous; his article reminds me of the biographical sketches Sam Moskowitz did for AMAZING, only de Camp's are much better in my opinion. (And I'm not a Conan buff, either—in fact, I've never read a story by Howard.) But I can't understand why de Camp had to condense the article—why not simply cut it in half, and publish the rest of the article in the following issue?

Re convention costs: If fans ever wonder why some people don't nominate and vote for the Hugos, part of the answer is wrapped up in the cost. $4 is a lot just for voting and a program book, and overseas fans especially are hit by the cost (note that even Ethel Lindsay—in *Haverings* 46—said that she wouldn't be supporting the LA Con due to the cost). Why couldn't con committees offer a special "voting" membership, for $1 or so? I don't really care whether I get a program book, etc., or not, but I would like to vote.

The latest rumors seem to indicate that FANTASTIC & AMAZING's sales are dropping, apparently due to the recession and also distribution. *Sigh* But I wonder—if local distributors, as you say, have a "monopoly" on magazine distribution in their area, doesn't some anti-trust law come into play here? Monopolies are against the law, or like telephone and power companies, at least regulated by the government. If

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these local distributors have a monopoly in their areas on this, shouldn't they be government regulated?

Cy Chauvin
17829 Peters
Roseville, Michigan 48066

Apparently, Cy, regional (or metropolitan) distributorships are defacto monopolies—simply because no one feels like offering competition! Until 1958, when American News dropped its wholesale operation, there were two "local" distributors for most areas. When American News bowed out, it left the "independant" distributors with sole claim to the territory, and outside New York City there just doesn't seem to be any such thing as competition.—TW

Dear Ted White,

I was quite pleased to see (finally) the new logo for FANTASTIC on the June issue. The letters are very eye-catching, and should (let's hope and pray) increase sells even though the cover is not as good as those previous. One thing about the letters, however, the 'f' in FANTASTIC is overshadowed by the other, wider letters. I hope it can be changed to really make it stand out (but don't capitalize it). Speaking of standing out, the list of authors and stories on the cover is too obtrusive. It seems that there could be some way to print them somewhat smaller and work them into the cover design. In addition, there's really no reason to print a full contents page upon the cover (unless you want to imitate *Reader's Digest*). For example, for the June issue you could have just printed "the Byworlder" and *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers* upon the cover, and list as many other authors as possible upon the spine. I certainly wouldn't miss all that type especially since prints of the covers sans overprinting are not available (oh, how I wish they were!).

On the interior: I enjoyed your editorial and the lettercol, as always; the short stories were interesting, but not really outstanding; I haven't read Anderson's story yet (I'm waiting for the second half); was particularly happy to read de Camp's first chapter of *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers* even though it must have been butchered to fit the space (I hope future installments can be printed in their entirety without elbowing any other features out); I agree with almost everything that Alexei Panshin has to say and admire his groping efforts to re-define SF. I say groping because all these definitions are just water under the bridge but he is heading in the right direction.

SF needs a new name and a new image to go with it. People are just now coming to respect science fiction, but what they respect is a thing of the past. SF today is very different but the name, science fiction, is the same and it has a certain charisma which speculative fiction/fantasy and creative fantasy lack. Just look at the name and say it aloud. Science fiction. Science fiction. If you tell someone on the street who is somewhat acquainted with SF, Ah, we call it speculative fiction (or some such apellation)," he would look at you funny and say, "Oh yeah?" Afterward, he would remark about some dude who referred to SF by some stupid name.

You see, today we need a name that, when people hear it, say it, or read it, will be remembered and inspire this whole new image. I don't think that speculative fiction/fantasy or creative fantasy will ever fill the gap left by science fiction; they would simply set the field back. SF, just the letters with no name behind them, means all these definitions to all those people. Maybe we need a name behind them, and maybe we don't, but, nevertheless, when and if you hear it, you won't forget it.

David M. Powell
Rt. 3 Box 63
Princeton, W.V., 24740

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Dear Ted:

It's late, exactly 3:32 in the morning, but I've just finished perusing the June ish, thus I want to give my reactions while the memory of these august works is still fresh clay in my mind.

"War of the Doom Zombies" ended almost begging for further elaboration. What was presented thus far measured up to a higher standard than most "serious" S & S, but the ending seemed purposely constructed to allow for more adventures of "Upchuck the Barbarian." Whether this is the case or not, I wish it were so, because Richard Lupoff has a way of finely reducing the pretentiousness in any subgenre to its dross constituents. Although I doubt his work is intended as a moral lesson to the lax writer of Neat-o Peachy Keen (well, I consider Gosh Wow a little overused by now . . .) SF, it certainly kicks such neozippie farces between the legs of their vanity.

Larry Niven and Hank Stine are a rather incongruous pair to collectively pen a short story. However, they bring it off, but not without one of the most exotic uses of the record player I've yet seen in an SF story of any kind. This favorite device of my artificial affluence becomes an interesting metaphysical postmark. It was as if the protagonist lit up a joint and got some of the real stuff—not some drug store corner "screw the teeny-boppers" merchant's rip-offs—which really liberated his cerebral consciousness from the Life-Trip in favor of the Trip-Life. Also enjoyed the use of macrobiotics as in the Yin-Yang analogy. This fitted nicely with his hypnotism-induced mind search (gee . . . I'm still going to believe his cigarette helped set the atmosphere) through cosmic orgasms of time-space. Strange though, his thoughts after the Trip or whatever are some much more profound or heavy or——fill in the best cliché, than before. In a very strained way like the evolution of the 2001 astronaut from A+ in his own Correspondence School of Space to a higher reality. Shucks, Bennett Cerf could've given the authors at least a B+ on that one.

"The higher-paying markets" lost an intriguing short in Peck's little peep at the disappearing man. It really doesn't matter to me whether or not the erstwhile fellow literally vanished or just became another casuality in the suburban insulation- isolation flight from recognizing others as more than mere extensions of money/sex/death. Of course, the ending never really says that he'll ever break out of his social pariah-hood. Actually, that's sad, very sad; perhaps SF fans are the type of people doomed to such an unfeeling social cold shoulder.

Bryant is trying to be funny, but Lupoff did it so much better in his particular contrib that I almost overlooked this one. The only redeeming quality of the effort lies in the Houghman-caricature which reminds of some of Poul Anderson's colorful exaggerations. The hip huckster dialect reminds me of some guys I know who aren't as successful as the psychic detective in their work. Guys that diffidently talk of peace and love, but sold all theirs to a record company.

L. Sprague de Camp does exceedingly well, considering the space limitations. I'm doubly impressed by the matter-of-fact manner in which he related the events of Howard's short life. As a true historian he maintained an objective eye, even in the face of some less pleasant sides of the writer's personality; i.e., his "racism." A less scrupulous author would've gone for the cheap thrills of such revelations. Yes, I can surely tell that de Camp probably never wrote for the tabloids.

Wow! Let me second your emotion about con costs, Ted White. I have to pose all kinds of rip-offs and odd jobs to manage to collect enough green pollution to go

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places. The Noreascon fee fucked me up for a lot of other things. But I guess Tony Lewis really doesn't want "heepie" college students around at his fine upper-class Event. I'm going to make it anyway, somehow.

It's almost 4:14 now, and I have Things To Do, so . . .

David Wm. Hulvey
Rt. 1, Box 198
Harrisonburg, Va. 22801

Hmmmm. It's 3:17 in the ayem right now, and you're right: there are Things To Do . . . like wrapping this issue up. Next issue, remember, will be the special "Guilford Conference Writers' Issue," with a stronger accent on short stories. Try not to miss it.

—Ted White

(Continued from page 65)

image on it was poor, and the sound was almost as bad as it squawked and blasted from the speaker. But the characteristics were unmistakable.

"That's an interstellar call!" Toshi said in a tone of awe, and added unnecessarily, "Shhh!"

From the screen the shifting, blurred, but occasionally identifiable image of a plump but quite attractive woman with dark hair and bright pink cheeks was saying: "Dr Lem! One finds you in the directory for the enclave on Yan as its doyen, the only person listed except the warden who is currently not taking calls, so you'll forgive me if—"

"Who are you?" Dr Lem interrupted, recovering from his surprise. "Where are you calling from? What do you want?"

"My name is Claudine Shah, and I'm calling from Earth," the woman said. Everyone on the verandah tensed, A call from Earth! There could have been no more than half a dozen of those since the foundation of the enclave.

"And I represent a travel bureau which has long been considering the addition of a ringed world to its available itineraries. A news-machine that passed your way recently reported the presence of Gregory Chart on Yan, and obviously that would be an optimum chance to—"

"Cancel this call," Dr Lem said. The screen obediently blanked. He let the 'net extension drift away from him with a lax hand and turned to look at his companions.

None of them spoke.

"I propose," Dr Lem said finally, "that we file petition with the government of Earth as a responsible pressure-group—what's the word? Ah! A *lobby!* To have Chart removed from Yan, if necessary by force. Something has got to be done to stop him re-creating the Mutine Age!"

—to be concluded—

—John Brunner

ON SALE IN NOVEMBER AMAZING(Sept. 7th)
THE WRONG END OF TIME by John Brunner
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Edited by
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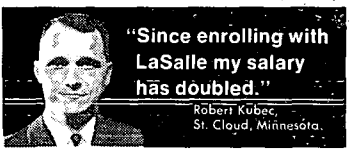

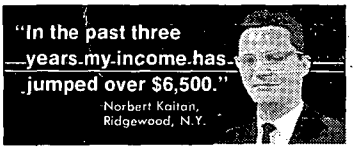

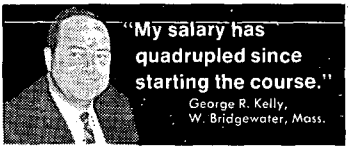

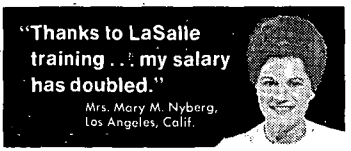

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